

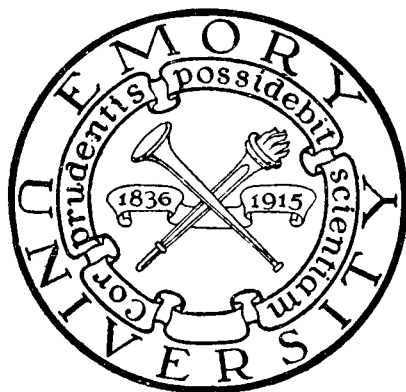
BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE CONDEMNED DOOR" &c

FICKLE HEART!



FORTUNE DU BOISGOBEY

ROBERT W WOODRUFF
LIBRARY



FICKLE HEART!

(*CŒUR VOLANT!*)

A Nobel of Love and Racing

BY

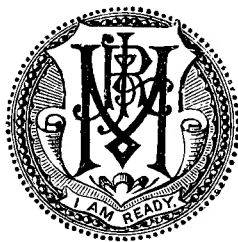
FORTUNÉ DU BOISGOBEY

AUTHOR OF "DEATH OR DISHONOUR," "CASH ON DELIVERY,"
ETC., ETC.

TRANSLATED BY

SIR GILBERT CAMPBELL, BART.

SOLE AUTHORISED COPYRIGHT TRANSLATION.



LONDON

JOHN AND ROBERT MAXWELL

MILTON HOUSE, ST. BRIDE STREET, LUDGATE CIRCUS,

AND

[SHOE LANE, FLEET STREET, E.C.

[*All rights reserved.*]

The Parisian Library

In Appropriate, Illuminated Covers

ONE SHILLING EACH VOLUME

Or in Cloth, 1/6

By FORTUNÉ DU BOISGOBEY

- | | |
|--|---------|
| The Red Band (La Bande Rouge). | 2 vols. |
| The Condemned Door (Porte Close). | 2 vols. |
| Death or Dishonour (Jean Coupe-en-Deux). | 2 vols. |
| The Blue Veil ("Angel of the Bells"—La Violette
Bleue, ou l'Ange du Bourdon). | 1 vol. |
| Cash on Delivery (Rubis sur l'Ongle). | 2 vols. |
| The Cry of Blood (Le Cri du Sang). | 2 vols. |
| The Felon's Bequest (L'Héritage d'un Forçat). | 2 vols. |
| Fickle Heart! (Cœur Volant !) | 2 vols. |

By RENÉ DE PONT-JEST

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------|
| The Divorced Princess (Divorcée). | 1 vol. |
|-----------------------------------|--------|

By ADOLPHE D'ENNERY

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--------|
| The Wife's Sacrifice (Martyre !) | 1 vol. |
|----------------------------------|--------|

* These Translations are not only fully protected, but NO other Versions are sanctioned, authorised, or allowed by the Author. These are the *only approved translations*.

London: J. & R. MAXWELL, 35, St. Bride Street, Ludgate Circus, and
at all Booksellers and News Agents.

CONTENTS



VOLUME I

CHAP.	PAGE
I. HUSBAND AND WIFE	5
II. THE VISIT OF ROMÉO... ..	13
III. FICKLE HEART... ..	20
IV. A DEFEAT AND A VICTORY	28
V. THE SATIN COVERLET... ..	36
VI. A SELF-MADE MAN	40
VII. A STORMY INTERVIEW	49
VIII. AN ARISTOCRATIC HUSBAND	54
IX. IN SEARCH OF A LOVER	59
X. A CAPITALIST IN LIVERY	66
XI. THE SIGNATURE TO THE BILL	77
XII. AN UNLICENSED EDEN	82
XIII. CARTE AND TIERCE	94
XIV. ON THE COURSE—PART I.	107
XV. ON THE COURSE—PART II.	118
XVI. THREE CONSPIRATORS	125
XVII. 'TWIXT HUSBAND AND FATHER	137
XVIII. A RACING MEPHISTOPHELES	148
XIX. A DREAM	160
XX. THE AWAKENING	165
XXI. "I WILL DO IT"	174
XXII. THE LADIES' BATTLE	188

Contents

VOLUME II

CHAP.	PAGE
XXIII. THE PLAN OF DEFENCE	193
XXIV. A DOUBTFUL SIGNATURE	205
XXV. A VILLAIN'S HONOUR	220
XXVI. MALVINA MARTINGALE	226
XXVII. A DELICATE MISSION	239
XXVIII. AN AMICABLE ARRANGEMENT	250
XXIX. AN UNEXPECTED MEETING	257
XXX. A RUN OF LUCK	260
XXXI. LOST !	276
XXXII. "MY LORD, 'TIS JEALOUSY"	289
XXXIII. VAGUE SUSPICIONS	296
XXXIV. AN HONEST JOCKEY	307
XXXV. "IS SHE WORTH IT ?"	312
XXXVI. INDECISION	315
XXXVII. THE RACE	329
XXXVIII. CHECKMATE TO MASTER AND MAN	337
XXXIX. THE FORTUNE-TELLER OF MONTMARTRE	348
XL. THE CHAMBER OF DEATH	363
XLI. THE FINGER OF FATE	367
XLII. "HOIST WITH HIS OWN PETARD"	379

FICKLE HEART!

CHAPTER I

HUSBAND AND WIFE

It was an unmistakable winter night. The snow, which had fallen heavily, covered with its white carpet all the lawns and walks of the garden which lay beneath the windows of a magnificent mansion that towered majestically above the entrance to the Avenue d'Eylau, and which in no way resembled those gimcrack structures which are usually tenanted by ladies of a certain class.

It was a princely mansion, and worthy to rank amongst palaces.

The front of the house faced the Avenue d'Eylau, but it stood far back, being built in the midst of a regular park, studded with clumps of lofty trees.

The mansion was made up of a central building, with two retreating wings, and on the front wall, graven in stone, were the armorial bearings of the owner.

Passers-by envied the fortunate lot of the rich, and noble master ; but they forgot to ask themselves, if he was also happy.

It was three o'clock in the morning, but the windows in the ground-floor in the right wing were still lighted up.

In a small sitting-room, the walls of which were hung with silken drapery, a man and a woman were talking together. The woman who was still young, and tolerably good-looking, kept moving backwards and forwards between the fire-place and the window. The man was tall and well made, clean shaved, and correctly attired in black ; he leaned against the

mantel-piece, and spoke in that solemn manner which is habitual to the servants of a well-conducted mansion, who from their position, are compelled to maintain a serious demeanour.

He was but a valet, but a valet of the first-class rank, who had only served in aristocratic families, and was conscious of his own superiority. The woman was a lady's maid, such as are now never seen, save on the stage of the *Comédie Française* in old-fashioned pieces—smart, sagacious, and cunning, thoroughly well posted up in all that was going on around her, even in her mistress's most cherished secrets.

"No sound of carriage wheels in the avenue," said she, after listening attentively. "This is the first time that my mistress has been so late in returning from a ball."

"Perhaps she has waited to dance the cotillon," remarked the man-servant, with a knowing air.

"She has never done such a thing in her life! Besides the Count would not allow it."

"He is right; the cotillon is a dangerous dance for husbands; there are a number of figures in it which furnish fine opportunities for flirtation."

"Francis, my good fellow, you are not sharp. Women can always find opportunities. For instance, if by any ill luck, I should marry you, do you think that I should have any difficulty in doing so? I hate a jealous husband."

"The Count is one of that sort."

"And a great fool he is for his pains, for my mistress gives him no reason to be so."

"Pooh, Miss Lisa, you know nothing about it; besides she is a bit of a flirt."

"Hold your wicked tongue; you are all in the wrong: my mistress is not a goody-goody, but she is an honourable woman for all that. I would go bail for her. If there was anything wrong, I should know all about it. It is quite true that she is fond of amusement, and that she is never so happy as when she is at a dance; but is not that better than mixing herself up with all sorts of society intrigues?"

"Well, perhaps so; and then she did not go out much before she was married. Her father's society was chiefly composed of building contractors like himself. She made a fine thing of it in marrying the Count de Sartilly, who ranks with the first nobility of France——"

"Yes; and who had not a rap when he married. Where would he now be, pray, without the six millions which old Vacheron gave his daughter, not to mention this splendid mansion? And yet your noble master from the life he leads seems as if he would run through it all."

"But hang it : in Paris, it costs money to live in proper style. The stables alone cost the Count——"

"Three times less than the gambling table, and the other things. He will come to no good, remember that, Francis."

"That may be ; but even then I shall console myself. I have made my little pile during the six years that I have been in his service ; and if you are willing, you naughty girl, we can start on our own account. With your savings and mine, we could open a splendid milliner's shop."

"Thank you very much ; but I shall never leave my mistress, especially when she is unhappy."

"Unhappy ! get along with you ; old Vacheron has still ten millions left, and if her husband ruins her she will always have the opportunity of suing for a divorce."

"So she could if she was not so infatuated with her husband. But she simply adores him. She ought to be afraid of him, for I believe him to be capable of anything. Listen," continued the waiting woman, glancing through the window, "Mlle. Diana has not yet gone to bed, there is a light in her room."

"Does that surprise you ?" asked Francis with a sneer.

"Certainly it does, she is never up after midnight."

"Do you believe that ? Well I am certain of the contrary ; why sometimes she actually goes out for a walk in the park, much later than this. And if I were in the Countess's place, I would put no faith in companions. They are good enough for old dowagers who want to have novels read to them, but your mistress is two and twenty ——"

"Her doctor has forbidden her to exert her eyes, and besides, Mlle. Diana, is her former schoolfellow, and as she has no fortune ——"

"Yes, that is all very good, but it does not prevent strange things from happening here, and if I were to tell you ——"

"But I don't wish to hear anything, Master Francis, and I advise you to go about your duties, for here come the Count and Countess."

As she spoke the gate which lead into the avenue d'Eylau turned on its hinges, and whilst the footman who had opened it, closed it again, a handsome carriage magnificently horsed rolled up to the steps of the house, with its lamps shining through the darkness like a pair of meteors.

"Thank you Miss Lisa, for having given me the office," said Francis. "Had the Count not found me in his room there would have been a nice to do, and as he never makes any stay now in your mistress's room, it is time for me to clear out of this."

"Get away, you great loafer," exclaimed the waiting-maid,

pushing him out of the room : then as soon as she found herself alone, she murmured. "It is quite true that for the last six months, the Count has not once in the evening come near my mistress's room. And yet she submits to it. On my word, women who move in society must be fools." She paused, and listened. "It is strange," continued she, "I can almost imagine that I hear the Count's voice on the staircase. Is he by any chance going to make it up with her. I should be much astonished if he did. And yet it is certainly he, but he is not saying very pleasant things to her."

The door flew open and the Countess de Sartilly entered enveloped in furs ; the Count followed her closely, and took up a position in front of the fireplace with his hat on his head, and his hands in the pockets of his overcoat, whilst Lisa occupied herself in removing her mistress's wraps.

"Leave us," said the Countess, "I will undress myself to-night. I hope that you have not lit a fire in my bedroom."

"Madame has forbidden me to do so, and as I know that Madame dreads too much heat even at this season of the year, I have left the window open, but I will go now and ——"

"It is useless, I will shut it myself. Leave us."

Lisa left the room, saying to herself. "A reconciliation indeed! Yes, very like one. How savagely the master eyes her, and I can see that she has been crying. Poor little thing. She has paid dearly for her title. The monster will end by beating her."

Lisa was not mistaken, Mme. de Sartilly could hardly restrain her tears ; she sank into an arm-chair, and burst into loud sobs.

She was a very handsome dark woman, with a skin as white as alabaster, and lips like the blossom of the pomegranate tree. A real type of Spanish beauty, though her birthplace was on the Boulevard Haussmann. Her eyes were neither blue nor black, but resembled in hue the violets of Parma. For a moment she raised them to the Count's face, and then as if to avoid the angry glance that he cast on her, she bent her head, and hid her face in her hands.

Her husband was a handsome man of tall stature and haughty demeanour, his features were aristocratic, and his long fair moustache was carefully arranged.

He resembled a musketeer of a by-gone age, like the Athos of King Louis XIII. in Dumas' romance.

"Enough of these tears, my dear," remarked he contemptuously. "Were you taught to whine like this in your

father's house? All you have to do now is to make a scene, so as to complete your want of form."

"I entreat you Gontran!" murmured the Countess.

"I have already told you, and I repeat it again, that at the Marchioness de Muire's dance, you behaved in a most detestable way. You danced awkwardly, you waltzed like a shop-girl, and in addition you waltzed much too often with that fellow who has made his way, I do not know how, into select society, and who looks like a shop-walker in a large linen-draper's. What do you say his name is?"

"Henri Trévières, he is a friend of my father's."

"He looks like one," retorted the Count insolently. "But I have told you before that I did not like him, and that you were not to receive his ridiculous attempts at politeness as you have done, but no attention was paid to my orders. Very good, only remember that for the future, I shall go my own way. But let us leave this topic, for I came here this evening to discuss much more serious matters with you."

In extreme astonishment the Countess gazed intently upon her husband's face, in its expression she seemed to read the coming of some future evil.

But after this alarming commencement, M. de Sartilly stopped short, and listened. "What was that?" exclaimed he, "I hear persons running down the little street outside the garden wall, and it seems to me that they are crying out 'murder' or 'fire'!"

The Countess, much alarmed, listened in her turn.

"No," continued M. de Sartilly, after a short silence. "I can hear nothing more. I must have been deceived, and it was the wind making the boughs of that great chestnut tree grate against each other, that tree that has so idiotically been placed under your window. Another of your father's ideas. He spent unheard-of sums of money in transporting well-grown trees, and stuck them here and there, as if he had not two grains of sense. I'll have that chestnut tree cut down."

"What pleasure can you find, Gontran, in continually sneering at my father?" asked the young woman sadly.

"I don't sneer at him, I merely assert that he has no taste. The whole house is ridiculous with its abbreviated wings, and its great beast of a front, which resembles a college, or a barrack. And he spent millions on it! He had much better have sold it to some perfumer who had made his fortune."

"Do you reproach him for having given it to you?"

"What do you mean by giving it to me. It is to you, my dear, that it belongs, to you alone, and as M. Vacheron took

care to settle everything on you, I have no right without your permission to get rid of this abominable edifice, any more than the power to touch the capital of your dowry lodged in your name in the Bank of France. The income is nearly all absorbed by the expenses of our establishment, and if I lose a couple of thousand louis, at cards or at races, I do not know where to lay my hands on them."

"If I recollect such an event has already happened——"

"Yes ; and I went to M. Vacheron, and at your intercession, after I had made a bad book in the Grand Prix, he consented to advance me the hundred and fifty thousand francs that I required, but he did so with extremely bad grace. It was a mere question of his bringing up ; underbred people do not know how to give."

This fresh insult brought a scarlet flush to Mme. de Sartilly's face, but she dared not raise her head, and her husband emboldened by her weakness continued with a sudden access of bitterness. "Oh, I am not angry with him, an ex-contractor in the building trade cannot be supposed to possess the instincts of a gentleman ; but I ask you now, if you will have the courage to go to your father once more in case I should be again in want of a certain sum of money ?"

"You know that I have courage for anything," murmured the Countess."

This allusion to the indignities that she had endured since her marriage did not soften her husband. "So," resumed he, "you will not refuse to rescue me from my embarrassments ?"

"What, have you lost again, this very night ?"

"Yes, at the Marchioness de Muire's, twenty thousand francs, it was all your fault, I was irritated at seeing you waltzing with M. Trévières, and to avoid the unpleasant spectacle that you afforded me, I made a fourth at whist, five hundred francs the point. But it is not a question of that trifle."

"Gracious heavens then, what is the matter ?"

"This is it. I am going halves with the Viscount de Saint Senier in establishing a racing stable."

"Our neighbour who lives in the house opposite ?"

"Just so, he does not go into society because all his time is taken up with sporting matters. But you have met his wife."

"Yes, I have, and I dislike her very much."

"All the worse for you, she makes Saint Senier very happy, for she brought him an immense fortune, and besides she married him without settlements. Well, I tell you Saint Senier and I are going halves in running our horses at the

spring meetings. My share will be three hundred thousand francs, and the time for payment has now come. Will you get them for me from your father?"

The Countess made no reply.

"You hesitate," continued Sartilly. "Do not let us talk any more about it. I only asked you to do something for me, and it does not suit me to implore you, but henceforth I shall know what dependence to place on your attachment to me, and shall act accordingly."

This last attack was too much, and the young woman rebelled against it. "What can you do to me more cruel, than the state of abandonment in which I now live?" exclaimed she. "I love you, Gontran, I love you still, and your cruel disdain breaks my heart. How have I deserved it? What have you to reproach me with? Do you dare to assert that I deceived you? Do you not know that if you will come back to me, that I shall be only too delighted to take up once again the life that we first led together?"

Mme. de Sartilly's voice trembled as she permitted this last confession to escape her, and her unworthy husband did not allow the opportunity to pass by without profiting by it.

"I reproach you with nothing," answered he feigning an emotion he did not feel, "unless it is that you have not understood me. Listen to me, Valentine. I was passionately in love with you when we were first married. Our honeymoon lasted two years. I had hoped that it would have lasted for ever, and that you would have accustomed yourself to live in a manner befitting the Countess de Sartilly. You seemed to take pleasure in the world of fashion the gates of which I threw open to you, though they were firmly closed to so many other women. You were received with enthusiasm, and I had hoped that you would conform to its customs, and learn by example that a husband could retain his independence. You would have lost nothing by such a course, I swear to you. We can, believe me, love passionately without leading such a humdrum existence as the petty shopkeepers of the Marais do. But you allowed yourself little by little to be drawn away to that commonplace domestic life which you had learned in your father's house. You wished to sink into mere prosaic happiness, whereas it only depended on you to live with me as though I was more your lover than your husband, and yet you never guessed at my dream, I who have such a horror of conventionalities; but listen, I am going to speak to you openly, brutally, you may call it, if I have lately left your chamber unvisited, it was because I would rather have entered it by the window, like a Romeo,

had such been your wish, and not like a husband armed with all the right conferred upon him by the Civil Code. You did not believe that I was so romantic, did you ? But I have always been so, and age has been unable to correct this failing."

The most consummate actor could not have played his part better ; gesture, attitude, and passionate looks were none of them wanting.

"If I could only believe you," murmured Valentine.

"Put me to the proof ; commence by keeping at a distance this empty fop who is so repugnant to me and whose only merit is waltzing well. Come into my life, share my tastes. I love horses, all kinds of luxuries, and the world of fashion. Love all that too, and you will have no difficulty in again reconquering my heart."

"Is this true ? Is it really true ?" asked the Countess, deeply moved.

"Try it if you do not believe me ; at any rate it will be amusing. But if you do make the trial, begin by not going so often to mix in the shopkeeping society you find at your father's house."

"What, you advise me not to see my father, when just now——"

"Yes, I know, the three hundred thousand francs ; well, my dear, if it is repugnant to you to ask M. Vacheron for them, I will find means to borrow them elsewhere. And now that you are re-assured as to my intentions, and instructed as to my sentiments, I wish you good-night. I am going to my own room, and it depends on you whether I am always to remain there. Your chamber has no balcony ; never mind that, but think of Romeo."

And with these concluding words so full of promise, the Count de Sartilly played out his part by kissing the tips of his wife's fingers and leaving the room.

CHAPTER II

THE VISIT OF ROMEO

VALENTINE was overcome with feelings of emotion and joy, for she believed in the possibility of this reconciliation of which her husband had afforded her a glimpse, and she already began to reproach herself for not having sooner comprehended a character which dived so deeply into the refinements of love. She even chided herself for having so unkindly treated his proposals regarding a fresh loan. She again began to cherish the hope of bringing him back to her, and asked herself when the star of the shepherd—the star so dear to all true lovers, and which had been behind a cloud for more than a month—would shine again.

“Why not this very night?” murmured she softly, as she entered her bed-room.

The open window reminded her of Romeo climbing into Juliet’s chamber, and she took no steps to close it.

The window opened directly on to the park, and was some ten feet from the snow-covered ground, and six from the great chestnut tree which the Count wished to have cut down.

Valentine felt no desire for sleep, and leaning her elbow on the window sill, began to reflect on the incidents of the stormy interview which had just taken place. The night was cloudy, but not very cold, and she experienced a feeling of pleasure in cooling her burning forehead in the fresh night air.

All around was silent, and almost immediately in front of her rose the lofty railings which separated the Rue Villejust from the extensive garden of the mansion. There was no movement in that unfrequented street, which even in broad daylight was but little used as a thoroughfare. Beyond the railing was a much smaller house, belonging to Viscount Saint Senier, the side of which was turned towards the garden, and the Countess imagined that she could see a motionless shadow at the foot of the wall. Then she remembered the cries that her husband had fancied that he had heard, and asked herself if this shadow was not some individual keeping watch—doubtless a robber.

This was an unlikely supposition, but it frightened her, and made her draw back from the window.

The only light in her room was from a lamp, the globe of which, being covered with a shade, shed a soft light around the room, at the end of which stood the bed, half concealed by lace curtains of almost fabulous worth.

Valentine grew more and more nervous, and made up her mind to go to bed. She should have commenced by closing the window, but the idea of Romeo was still fresh in her recollection, and she had still some vague hope of seeing Gontran clambering over the bar that ran across it, so that she still deferred taking this indispensable precaution.

She began slowly to undress herself before a tall mirror that stood at the foot of the bed, and had already unfastened her corset when she saw reflected in the glass the figure of a man, who had drawn aside the curtains of the bed, and was standing erect some four paces from her !

The Countess had not the power to utter a cry. Her blood seemed to freeze in her veins, and she leaned against the glass with her eyes fixed upon the man, who on his part also remained motionless. There was nothing alarming either in his manner or appearance. He was young, quite young indeed, for the white skin of his face was hardly darkened by any sign of beard, his features were regular, and he had a gentle and submissive expression which ought to have dispelled Valentine's fears. At first she had taken him for a robber, who had broken into the house to plunder and murder, but he no more resembled a Parisian housebreaker than he did a Calabrian bandit. From his costume Mme. de Sartilly could not judge whether her strange visitor was well or badly dressed, for he wore a long greatcoat, which he had evidently thrown about him in a hurry, for only the top button was fastened, and he had not thrust his arms through the sleeves. His tie, which was unfastened, showed the neck of a young man, and his hair which was of a bright chestnut, curling naturally, was rumpled and in disorder. The greatcoat covered him from head to foot, but the Countess could see that he had on patent leather boots. Women even in moments of the greatest danger notice such things.

The handsome young man appeared to be as much embarrassed as the Countess was alarmed. For a brief space they both remained motionless, and silent, but the situation was not one that could be prolonged, and the young man was the first to break the silence.

"For heaven's sake, madame," exclaimed he in stifled accents, "do not ring the bell, or call for help !"

Madame de Sartilly grew calmer as she heard these commencing words, and by a powerful effort she succeeded in recovering a certain amount of her presence of mind.

"What are you doing in my room?" asked she.

"I am hiding myself, madame," murmured the handsome stranger.

"You doubtless mean that you are pursued by the police?"

"Not by the police, madame."

"By whom then? And how did you introduce yourself into my room?"

He pointed to the window. Valentine did not for a moment disbelieve his statement as to the manner in which he had effected his entrance, and she began to think that her husband was right in wishing to have the chestnut tree cut down.

"How long have you been here?" continued she.

"I ——. I do not know —, perhaps half an hour."

Gontran was quite right, thought she. This man was the fugitive after whom they were shouting "murder," he must have committed some crime; and yet his hands were not stained with blood, nor did he look like an assassin.

"You were in our garden then?" she began aloud.

"I got into it by climbing over the fence."

The gate and the railing which enclosed the Count de Sartilly's grounds were fully seven feet in height, and dressed as the stranger was, he must have been both strong and active to have been able to surmount such obstacles.

"You were then endeavouring to escape from someone?" asked Valentine.

"Yes, madame, I was endeavouring to escape, because it was impossible for me to act in self-defence."

He evidently understood that the Countess would feel astonished that he should have taken to flight instead of standing his ground, and that such an act would not raise him in her esteem.

"Why could you not defend yourself?" questioned she.

"Because had I done so, I should have endangered the honour and life of a woman. I was surprised in her company, and I had barely the time to make my escape. But now she is saved, for you will not ruin us. You will keep this incident a profound secret, will you not?"

"I can do that the more easily because I know nothing of it, nor do I wish to do so. But what could you hope for in taking refuge here, in my chamber? You must have seen that the house was inhabited, for you could see a light in the room."

"I did not take the time to think ; the window was open and the branches of the tree almost touched it —— "

"But you must have expected to be detected almost immediately. Suppose my husband had come in with me ; had he done so, he would have taken you for a robber, and would certainly have killed you."

"I was ready to die, no one would have known my name or where I came from, and no one would have suspected *her*."

So much devotion to a woman touched Valentine's heart. It was thus that she would wish to have been loved.

"Happily for you," she said, "I came in alone. Why did you not show yourself when first you saw me ?"

"I was fearful of alarming you ; but I felt that it would be an odious act to play the spy on you in your own room, at such an hour, so you will do me the justice of allowing I took no advantage of my position."

He spoke the truth, for he had emerged from his hiding-place at the moment when Madame de Sartilly was preparing to retire to rest. She appreciated this behaviour, and it was in a much gentler tone that she continued :

"But sir, you must see that it is impossible for you to remain here. I am willing to forgive your intrusion since you had no other means of escaping from a vengeance which would not have struck you alone. But now what do you intend to do ?"

"I am at your orders, madame."

"Then I advise you to leave by the same way that you came in, by the window ; it is more easy to descend than to climb up."

"If I descend I shall receive a bullet from a revolver. I am watched. The man who is hunting me is hidden on the other side of the street. He well knows that I must get out, and he is waiting for me."

"But if he saw you come into my room, I am lost ?"

"Alas, yes, if he kills me, for then you will be accused. But it is in your power to avoid this misfortune. Ah, madame, it is not my life that I am seeking to save, but your reputation."

"In my power ! What do you mean, what can I do ?"

"You can indicate to me some other means of exit from this house. Had you not come in, I should have sought for it myself. Your servants are in bed, and I hoped to find the staircase. There must be an entrance into the Avenue d'Eylau, and I should have escaped that way, and the man who is watching for me in the Rue Villejust would not have seen me."

"Yes, you might have made your escape, why did you not do so ?"

"I heard two voices in the adjoining room, yours, and ——"

"And my husband's."

"Then they died away. For a moment I hoped that there was no one there, and I was about to take the only path of safety that was left to me, when I heard your footsteps approaching the door; then I lost my head, and hid myself behind the curtains."

Valentine made no answer. She confessed to herself that the stranger was right, and that she might rid herself of her dangerous companion by pointing out to him the way through the house.

"I had," continued he, "made up my mind to run the risk of losing myself in a house with the interior of which I was unacquainted, but now guided by you, I shall be sure of success."

"Good," said the Countess after a silence, "it shall be as you desire; this room adjoins the small drawing-room which you must pass through, and you will find yourself on the main staircase. The door of the vestibule to which this staircase will lead you is closed, but you can open it from the inside, and when once you have gained the grounds, you have nothing to do but to climb over the railings as you have already done, for they are no higher on the side of the Avenue d'Eylau, than they were at the Rue Villejust."

"Oh madame, I owe you more than my life, and should the opportunity ever offer to show my gratitude, you will find me ready to die for you. My name is George ——"

"Silence," whispered Madame de Sartilly, suddenly.

Some one had come into the little drawing-room. The Countess had the presence of mind to move swiftly to the door and softly draw the bolts. Who was it that would be coming here at such an hour? Her maid had received orders to leave her for the night, and the Count had retired to his own room. Suddenly Valentine remembered the last words that he had made use of in leaving her; "*Think of Romeo*" he had said, after having given her a half-promise of the renewal of their honeymoon. He had come back earlier than she had hoped for, and this return once so ardently desired, now froze her very blood with terror.

Doubtless the young man understood the position of affairs, for he made a step towards the window. The Countess signed to him not to move, and remained perfectly still, her neck stretched out, listening eagerly, with one hand pressed upon her breast to restrain the beating of her heart. She heard some one endeavouring to open the door of communication, which however remained closed; then there were

four distinct taps, and lastly a voice which she knew well whispered, "Open, dearest, it is I——Gontran."

Then, as the Countess still remained silent, the voice once more murmured, "Are you asleep?" and the tapping recommenced louder than before. What Valentine suffered at that moment can only be understood by a woman who has been placed in a similar position. Gontran had come prepared for that reconciliation which she longed for with all her heart. If she opened the door, he would find her alone with a man, and if she kept it closed it would most likely result in a life-long separation, for her husband would never believe that she had not heard him, and admitting even that he did not accuse her of being shut up with a lover, he would never forgive her for having refused to receive her legitimate lord and master when he condescended to return to her.

Mme. de Sartilly overwhelmed with the dangers of her position, drew herself up and cast an appealing glance at the fugitive.

"I understand you," said he, coldly. "It is best for me to die. If I am killed in your garden, you can say that I came here to rob the house, and that I endeavoured to make my escape when you came suddenly upon me. No one will recognise my body."

As he spoke he moved quickly to the window, stepped upon the sill, and leapt upon the snow-covered ground beneath. Valentine distinctly heard the dull sound as his feet touched the ground, and then all was silence. She believed that the young man had succeeded in escaping without further accident, and drawing the bolt she threw open the door.

Gontran stood on the threshold. "What, not yet in bed?" asked he, casting a suspicious glance at her ball dress which she had not entirely removed. "How was it then that you did not open at once when I knocked, and why are you trembling so?"

The Countess more dead than alive, bent down her head, and could not find voice to justify her conduct. "Ha," continued the Count, "the window is open; I begin to understand."

At that moment two shots, one almost immediately following the other, rang sharply through the silence of the night.

"They have killed him," shrieked Valentine.

For the moment she forgot that her husband was there, and only recollected it when it was too late, for he had instantly caught the words that she had been foolish enough to let drop. Thrusting her roughly aside, he ran to the

window, and leaning out, looked eagerly into the grounds, but he could see no one either in the garden or in the Rue Villejust.

It was not a particularly dark night, and if the man who had just been fired at had been killed on the spot his body would have been plainly visible in the unspotted whiteness of the snow. If he had only been wounded, he might have fallen after having turned the corner of the house.

As for the person who had fired the shots, he had made it his business to disappear at once, and M. de Sartilly did not trouble himself to look for him.

Turning to his wife who remained riveted to the spot, he said coldly, "That was your lover who has just made his escape?"

"I have no lover," murmured the Countess.

"Who was here then, in your room? Are you going to tell me that it was a thief?"

"No; it was a man with whom I am entirely unacquainted."

"Indeed! But for all that you were expecting him, since you left your window open?"

"I swear to you, Gontran——"

"Do not swear; it is useless. Your oath would not convince me, and I have no time to listen to you. The scoundrel that I just missed catching here cannot have gone far, if the man who fired on him took a good aim. I will go and see what has become of him, and I shall not be long in bringing back news of him to you. Whilst I am absent I shall lock you up here, and I warn you not to attempt to escape as he has done by the window, for I too have arms, and I shall show you no mercy. I have surprised you with your lover, and have the right to kill you on the spot—remember that. Now I leave you to yourself; we will have our explanation presently;" and without affording his wife a chance of reply, the Count left the room, turning the key in the door outside.

Valentine heard him walk away hurriedly and overwhelmed with her emotions, sank down in an arm-chair.

CHAPTER III

FICKLE HEART

VALENTINE felt that she was lost, and the magnitude of her misfortune deprived her of all power of defending herself. What was taking place in the garden, where the stranger's corpse was perhaps lying in the snow? And if he were still alive what would Gontran do? Finish him doubtless, and then coming back would immolate one whom he affected to believe was the accomplice in his guilt.

Valentine's dream had been of a reconciliation with her husband, and now she had been placed by cruel fate in a position which might result in a double murder.

The Count himself would have been unable at that instant to reply to these terrifying questions which Valentine was asking herself, for he had as yet arrived at no settled determination. He had come to her that night because it suited him to bring about a reconciliation, and he had need of her to procure from his father-in-law an enormous sum, which the good man would certainly have refused to give to him, and Gontran, haughty gentleman as he was, had perceived that through threats he could obtain nothing from his wife, and had therefore attempted to arrive at his end by an entirely different method of acting. He knew that Valentine still adored him, and he had settled within himself that instead of coercing her it would be better for him to exhibit the affection of the repentant husband. After having carefully paved the way by his romantic allusion to the story of Romeo and Juliet, he had come down stealthily from his room to his wife's chamber, and had knocked at her door more like a lover who conceals himself, than a husband who comes armed with all the rights of the law. And had Valentine been alone this unworthy plot would certainly have succeeded. But now everything had undergone a complete change. He had got a hold upon her, and was now in the position of a husband whose honour had been attacked, and who was therefore able to issue his orders, and not implore favours at her hands. He imagined that he would profit greatly by this fresh situation. The only thing was that he was not completely clear as to the real history of this strange incident, and before returning to his wife he wished to know the full

details of the affair. He did not for a moment really believe that the man whom he had so nearly surprised was Valentine's lover, but appearances were terribly against her, and this untoward incident had placed her completely at his mercy. But now he had to settle with the fugitive, and before finding out the whole truth it was necessary to discover if he were alive or dead.

The large hall had two doors, one opening into the Avenue d'Eylau, and the other into the garden; they were both locked, but easy to be opened from the inside. Gontran went out by the one leading into the garden, and paused for a moment upon the steps before he proceeded in search of the unhappy man who had served as a target—for whom? Gontran on this point knew nothing, and cared less.

From the top of the steps he could see all that portion of the park which extended towards the Bois de Boulogne, and is bounded by another estate from which it is separated by an ivy-clad wall. The railing is only on the side of the Avenue d'Eylau, and the Rue Villejust, and on the side opposite to the street there are some plots of land not yet built upon. The park was laid out in the English fashion, with vast lawns, and winding paths according to the designs of the father of Mme. de Sartilly, the contractor Vacheron, who at a great expense had had a large quantity of full-grown trees removed hither, and planted in convenient positions.

As far as the eye could reach, a wide field of snow, which had fallen the evening before, spread itself out before Gontran, and no dark object marred the whiteness of the alabaster carpet. The fugitive therefore must have escaped, unless indeed he had crept away to die behind the left wing, that wing in which Lisa and Francis had seen the light burning whilst they were awaiting the return of their master and mistress in the little drawing-room. But he must certainly have left some traces behind him, for the snow, so dreaded by robbers and lovers, faithfully reproduces the prints of the feet that have pressed its surface.

From the position in which the Count was standing he could not catch a glimpse of these tracks, but they would certainly become visible when he drew nearer to the spot, "*In the pale light that falls from the stars,*" for the sky was now lighted up, and Gontran was desirous of knowing in which direction the fugitive had bent his steps.

Before starting on his hunt, he listened, and was delighted to hear no sound. The two pistol shots had not aroused any of the servants, and this was not very surprising, for the

wind was blowing rather strongly in the direction of the Bois de Boulogne. The Count was greatly pleased at this, for it would have been most unpleasant for him to have taken any of his domestics into his confidence regarding the nocturnal drama which had just been played in his house. He wished to act by himself, and he decided to begin at the point of departure, and step by step to follow the path taken by the man of whom he was in search. In order to do this, he crept along the front of the house, turning the corner and always keeping close to the wall until he reached the spot immediately below his wife's room. Looking upwards he saw that Valentine had closed her window but had not yet extinguished her lamp, but all his attention was soon concentrated on the ground, and he easily found the spot where the man had jumped down. The spot was marked by two deep cavities produced by his feet which had to bear the weight of the body after a leap from a height of ten feet. From here the fugitive had gone in the direction of an angle in the wall behind which he had hoped to find a shelter from the bullets that were awaiting him in the Rue Villejust. This at any rate was the notion that the Count conceived, and he was not far wrong. The foot-prints were plainly visible with long intervals between them, like those of a man who runs with all his might, but at one spot seemed to be closer together, and the snow appeared to have been stamped on, or trampled. "It was here that he was hit," thought Gontran, and of this he immediately had the proof, for stooping down he perceived by the side of the footmarks some irregular holes in the snow. These had been formed by the dropping of the warm blood, but for all that the man had not fallen. The tracks continued, but were now not so far apart, though more deeply imprinted. Being unable any longer to run, he was dragging himself painfully along. "He cannot have gone very far," thought Valentine's husband, "and he certainly would not have the strength to climb the railings, so now I am sure to find him." Then he continued his search, and the footprints led him past the other corner of the house across a wide lawn, where the snow which was harder was not perforated but spotted with red stains. Doubtless the man had endeavoured here to bind his wound, and the blood now only fell drop by drop. It seemed as if he were directing his course towards the land which had not been built on, and Sartilly felt sure that he would find the body at the foot of the railing. But he soon arrived at a spot where the lawn was crossed by a broad path, which the gardener had taken the trouble to sweep the night before, and upon which there was not a particle of

snow remaining. The book in which Gontran had been reading the story of the flight of the fugitive had ceased to be of service to him, and those pages made by the frost had disappeared entirely. In this path Gontran could find no more signs, but it must lead somewhere, and if the wounded man had gone along it, Gontran had only to follow it to see where he had got to. Valentine would have known at once, for she was in the habit of walking each day in the grounds, but her husband who was no admirer of nature seldom entered them, and he was asking himself where this path would lead to, when he perceived a light some fifty paces in front of him. It was evident that this light proceeded from a lantern carried in the hand, for it was about two feet from the ground.

Who was walking about the grounds at such an hour carrying a lantern? The Count could not imagine, but thought it best to put himself in an attitude of defence. As a gambler who was frequently compelled to return home at all hours, sometimes with large sums of money about him, he had contracted the habit of carrying a loaded revolver, he had even taken it with him to the ball, and he had not laid it aside when he had paid the visit to his wife's chamber. In the old days of the Spanish monarchy the king always went to the queen's room with his naked sword under his arm.

Gontran drew the weapon from his pocket and coolly waited for the approach of the man who came slowly to him, and when he had arrived within ten paces he cried, "Halt, or I fire."

"My lord, the Count," exclaimed a voice which Sartilly did not at first recognise.

"Who are you?"

"Francis, your lordship's valet."

"Come up to me then."

It was an awkward meeting, but it was too late to avoid it now.

"What are you doing here?" asked the Count, as soon as he found himself face to face with his servant.

"Did not your lordship hear anything?" asked Francis.

"Two pistol shots, of course, and I am looking for the person who fired them."

"I had the same idea as your lordship, and so I came out and took a turn round the grounds, but have seen no one, and besides, the gate is securely fastened. It is most extraordinary."

"Where does the path in which we now are, lead to?" asked M. de Sartilly abruptly.

"To those little steps, my lord, which you can see from here," answered the valet raising the lantern, the light from which fell upon three steps, with shrubs in pots on each side of them. "At the top of which is the door that leads to the private staircase conducting to Mlle. de Ganges' rooms," and Francis added in half a whisper, "How very curious, why the little door is open?"

Gontran thought that the wounded man must have taken refuge within, and he did not feel inclined to leave him there, but he felt that Francis was much in his way. "Good," said he, "leave me your lantern, and go back to the house."

"Your lordship is not thinking of staying here by yourself. Suppose you were to meet this armed malefactor?"

"I am also armed, as you see. Get back to the house, I tell you. Go up to your room, and do not leave it on any account, unless I ring for you, and remember, not a word of this to anyone, or else you leave my service at once," added Gontran, taking the lantern from the hands of Francis, who went off without a word, but not without thinking that strange things were taking place in, and about the residence of the Count de Sartilly.

His master waited until he had disappeared round the angle of the house, and then deliberately ascended the steps which he examined carefully. He could find no traces of blood, but whoever had ascended them last had shaken off the snow upon them, and this visitor must have come recently for each morning the steps were carefully swept, and every atom of snow removed from them. It was therefore evident that some one had been there since the close of night, and the Count did not for a moment believe that this visitor had been his wife's companion.

He knew this companion very well, but she was of a class that is not often seen. Indeed, he had for the past year paid a great deal of attention to her, and she was worth the trouble, for she was perfectly charming. Her name was Diana de Ganges, and she was the last scion of a noble family, but as her parents at their death had only left her an annual income of six thousand francs upon which to live, she had calmly resigned herself to becoming Valentine's companion, who had been her dearest friend at school. She was a girl of strange disposition, and no one, not even Mme. de Sartilly had been able to fathom the depths of her character. Wayward as a child, and haughty as a princess, she had contrived to secure an independent position in the family in which she was after all but a salaried servant. Valentine permitted her to come and go as she liked, and to receive such visitors as she chose, and to have her meals in her own

room, whenever the fancy to do so possessed her. The Count made no objection to her freedom, for he had made up his mind to gain her love some time or other. He had no faith in the virtue of a girl who had fallen from the position that she had formerly occupied, and if he had up to that time refrained from any open attempts at her seduction, it was because he had not yet definitely made up his mind to break entirely with his wife. But he had been playing a waiting game, and he now asked himself if the favourable opportunity had not arrived, to pile one more infidelity upon the many to which Valentine had already become the unconscious victim.

"*Parbleu*," muttered he to himself. "If Diana has given an asylum to the man I am searching for, she will no longer be able to take high hand with me, and she will not, I trust, decline to deliver up to me this climber of windows." He knew that the fair companion of his wife had her apartments on the mezzanine floor, and he made haste to reach it.

At the door he halted a moment to listen, regardless of his position as a gentleman, or of the noble traditions of his ancestry. He fancied that he could hear voices inside, and he knocked vigorously on the panel. After a few seconds' interval a female voice asked, "Who is there?" and he did not hesitate for a moment in replying, "Gontran de Sartilly."

He expected that he would be met with delay and evasions, but the door flew open at once, and Diana appeared on the threshold in all the glory of her resplendent beauty.

She was a really magnificent creature. There are fair women with black eyes, and dark ones with blue eyes. Diana's hair was of the true Titian red, and her eyes had the sheen of the emerald; but what hair, and what eyes! A picture of Titian stepping out of its frame was all that she could be compared to. She was clad in a full red dressing-gown, fantastically embroidered. She had the imposing air of some barbarous queen, had it not been for the gleam of education and intelligence that shone in every line and feature of her face. Flashes of fire darted from her eyes, and her voluptuous lips seemed to invite the kiss of love. She did not appear in the slightest degree alarmed at a visit at so extraordinary an hour, and it was with a mocking smile upon her lips that she said, "Good evening, my dear Count, pray have you turned somnambulist, that you walk about in the night with a lantern in your hand?"

"You know better than that," answered de Sartilly, with a light laugh. "I am hunting for a robber."

"And you come to look for him in my room!"

"I lost his tracks in the garden, and I fancied that he

might have sought refuge here, I mean of course, without your permission."

"You get strange fancies into your head, my dear sir, my room is not a branch of the charitable establishment known as the Night Refuge."

"I am well aware of that, but I have something to say to you. Will you grant me a few moments' interview?"

"Most certainly, but not here on the landing, it is too cold. Come inside, Count."

Gontran did not wait for her to repeat her invitation, but entered the apartment at once. Diana placed her candlestick upon the table which stood in the lobby in which he found himself, and then stepping up to the door which led into the interior of her suite of rooms, turned the key in the door. "You must pardon me for receiving you in such a place where there are no seats. Not that I have the least fear of you, but because I agree with Englishwomen who allow only their husbands into their bedrooms."

"Or their lovers," returned the Count, with a slight sneer.

"You are not mine, and you never will be, but now say what you have to say, for I am listening to you."

Sartilly, confused by this sudden attack for the first time perhaps, in his life, maintained an embarrassed silence in the presence of a woman. He asked himself what was the best way to commence, and for a moment he lost sight of the object of his visit. Never had Diana de Ganges appeared so beautiful in his eyes, and he felt conquered by a mad desire to confess in the most passionate terms that it was only her own charms that had drawn him hither.

"Take care," said Diana, after the silence had lasted for a few moments. "You will only make yourself ridiculous if you continue looking at me in this manner. Come, confess frankly that your story of the robber is but a pretext, and a very foolish one too, to introduce yourself into my room at an hour when all respectable people are asleep."

"And suppose that such was the case?" exclaimed Gontran. "Suppose I said that I was mad for you, and that I would do all in my power to gain your love?"

Diana did not blench before this open declaration. She merely gazed boldly at Sartilly, with an inexplicable smile upon her lips.

"Do you intend," continued he, "to pass all your life in reading novels to my wife. You, who were born to lead a life of ease and pleasure? Well, this life I offer you. You have but to speak the word, and you shall have horses, carriages, and a magnificent house. Speak, and I——"

"If I comprehend what you say," interrupted the companion, "you offer me your protection."

"I did not care to put it so plainly, but since you have pronounced the word, let it pass."

"And the money for all these luxuries will come from the fortune of Valentine?" continued Mlle. de Ganges.

Gontran grew pale with anger.

"I merely place matters in their true light," she went on. "You yourself have nothing; the very house in which we are standing does not belong to you."

Sartilly thought that she was endeavouring to make a better bargain, before committing herself, and he therefore replied in a half-contemptuous tone:

"Why are you disturbing yourself, my dear girl—so that the money comes in freely, why question its source?"

"Count," answered Valentine's companion, "you are a mere fool. Such proposals may suit women of a certain class to whom you may have the right to make them; but I am as well-born as yourself. The Ganges come of as ancient a stock as the Sartillys, and if I made any bargain with you, it would be as an equal who treats with an equal. I have willingly accepted Valentine's kindness because she is my friend; but I have no need of yours."

Gontran was bitterly enraged, and desired to return insult for insult.

"Plague take it, my dear girl," said he, with a sneer, "I did not think that you were such a prude."

"You are wrong again; there is not a shadow of prudery in me, and the proof of it is, that should I elect to take a lover, I should trouble myself no more about doing so than I should in changing him as the fit took me. In the school where I was brought up with your wife they nicknamed me Fickle Heart, because I was never constant in my friendships. Well, Fickle Heart I was, and Fickle Heart I shall remain, but I will never lower myself to take your wages."

Exasperated to the highest pitch, Gontran vainly sought for some means of retaliating, for her words had wounded him to the quick. Without thinking what he did he rested his hand upon the marble top of the table. As he did so he started violently. "Where does this blood come from?" asked he, stretching out his hand to Diana, and showing her that his palm was stained with blood.

CHAPTER IV

A DEFEAT AND A VICTORY

AT this unexpected question, a shade of uneasiness passed over Diana's face, but with a strong effort she recovered herself. "Where does the blood come from?" repeated she, contemptuously. "I know nothing about it. You have scratched yourself, no doubt, in running about the garden. Have you come up here to ask me to bind up your wounds?"

"A truce to raillery," answered the Count. "The blood is that of the man whom I am pursuing, and you have picked him up and sheltered him in your room."

"Picked him up! A delightful expression. Pray, do you think that I go out at night to see if I may chance to come across a wounded man lying in the snow?"

"Why not? You were not in bed, and must have heard two shots. If, after that, you remained in your own rooms, you must be without the slightest curiosity."

"I heard nothing; and if I was not in bed, it was because I had no desire to sleep. Besides, even if I had heard shots, I should not have put myself out. It is not a part of my duty to act as watchman in your grounds."

"Then, you dare to assert that you are alone in your room?"

"I should have been alone, if you had not permitted yourself to come to the door of my room at four o'clock in the morning, and if I had not been foolish enough to let you in."

"Very good; then nothing is left for me but to verify the truth of your statement," exclaimed Sartilly, walking towards the door that communicated with the other rooms.

Diana boldly barred the way. "Not a step further," said she, in a tone which made him stop short.

He felt that if he wished to proceed with the search, it would be necessary to employ force; and enraged as he was he could not bring himself to enter into a hand-to-hand struggle with a woman.

"If no one was inside," muttered he between his teeth, "you would not oppose my passing through that door."

"Believe what you like," retorted Diana. "If you wish it, you may even imagine that I have a lover concealed there, that I have let in during the night. Well, suppose I have

done so, I am neither your wife nor your mistress, and owe you no explanation. By what right do you venture to propose to enter my room?"

"The man that I am looking for was surprised by me a short time back in Valentine's room."

"You lie! You know as well as I do that Valentine never had a lover, and even if she had one you have lost all right to complain. You, who are constantly unfaithful to her, and who this very night have insolently offered to purchase my honour. But I am wearied out with hearing you, so make an end of this, I beg of you, and leave my room at once."

Gontran was not accustomed to be treated in this manner. Passion had obtained so strong a mastery over him that it was all that he could do to restrain himself from using violence to the insolent woman who defied him. But he still had sense enough to perceive that by doing so he would not gain his ends. If the wounded man had really sought refuge in Mlle. de Ganges' room, and if he discovered him there it would be a clear proof that Valentine was not guilty, for a lover does not go from one mistress to another, even if they are dwelling under the same roof; and then again, even if Valentine had received this wandering lover of her own free will she could deny the fact, and Diana was quite capable of taking the blame of the whole transaction upon herself. Her exposition of her possible line of action proved this beyond all doubt.

Gontran therefore defeated by the indomitable will of his wife's companion, could derive no benefit from this strange incident, save that of riveting the chain of slavery tighter round his wife, and compelling her to submit to his wishes, by threatening her that he would use those rights which the law grants to the outraged husband, of taking the punishment into his own hands.

"You send me away," said he with an ironical smile. "The world seems to be turned upside down. But remember my turn will come."

"That, doubtless, means that to-morrow you will dismiss your wife's companion; but I will not give you that trouble. To-morrow I shall leave the house, but until I do so this room is mine, and I again order you to leave it."

"Very good," replied M. de Sartilly, drily. "Think yourself lucky in being a woman, and go when you like; I shall know where to find you again, and as I presume you will soon furnish yourself with a lover, I will make him responsible for your insolence." With these words he was about to leave when Diana de Ganges exclaimed in a mocking tone of voice: "Take care; you are forgetting your lantern."

This last stroke completed Gontran's exasperation. He felt

that he was an object of ridicule, and he hastened to put an end to a scene so humiliating to his self-love.

He snatched up the lantern which on entering he had placed on the table, and furiously hurried away. As he did so, he heard Diana shut herself in, and as he reached the garden his passion exploded. For the first time in a life which as far as love affairs went had been a tolerably successful one, he had been repulsed, and he cursed the woman who had done so, shaking his fist as he did so in the direction of her rooms. "The haughty devil has jeered at me enough, I hope. She has the man with her. Where did he come from, and who is it that fired at him! I do not know, but I begin to believe that after all my wife is innocent. What does that matter however. She shall pay for all, and I need no longer play the part of a sentimental lover. I have got her tight now, she must obey me, and that old wizard of a father-in-law of mine must put his hand in his pocket."

With these words the cynical gentleman took the path by which he had come, and by the light of the lantern in the snow he perceived what he had not seen before, the prints of a woman's feet going towards the place where the steps of the fugitive had stopped.

"Good," thought Gontran; "now I see it all. She came down when she heard the shots. She saw the wounded man who could get no further. She went up to him, and supported him to her room, she may even have carried him, for she is strong enough. I am not astonished at having got blood on my fingers, he must have touched the table with his hand as he passed, and now I will wager that he is snugly ensconced in that jade's bed. I shall have a nice account to settle with her some day; but I will begin with Valentine."

Instead of following the windings of the path, he crossed the lawn, so as to get back more quickly, and in the hall he was much annoyed at meeting his valet, who had not gone to bed, as he had been ordered to do. But Francis did not give him time to say anything. "Your lordship will pardon me for having disobeyed you in waiting up for you here. I thought it was my duty, but I am too much attached to you to conceal the fact that for some time past strange things have happened here."

"Which have nothing to do with me," interrupted Gontran.

"I know that—but—I have seen "

"What?"

"That Mlle. de Ganges goes out, at hours that——"

"Then you have been watching her, it seems?"

"Oh, I have seen what I have, without wishing to do so,

It often happens that I cannot sleep, and then I sit at my window, and smoke my pipe, with all respect to your lordship, and more than once I have seen mademoiselle crossing the garden. It seemed to me, as if she were coming home. But had it not been for what has occurred to-night, I should not have ventured to say anything to your lordship. There was a man for certain in the grounds, and someone connived at his escape. And that is why, seeing that your lordship was about to go Mlle. de Ganges' room——"

"You have made a mistake, master Francis, and I do not like this habit of yours of watching what I do. You are my valet, and it is your business to confine yourself to the duties of your position, and not to do watchman's work at night in the garden, much less to bring me bits of gossip that I do not wish to hear. These are things that I do not intend to put up with, so prepare to leave my service. You will go to-morrow."

"This is but a poor reward for my zeal. All that I have said or done was for your lordship's interest, for if society knew that people came at night into the grounds, into the very house, and that pistols were fired off, I am sure that your lordship would not be pleased."

Gontran knew servants well, and perceived at once the veiled threat concealed beneath the civil language of his valet.

It depended entirely upon Francis whether this complicated story should get wind or not, and if the man were dismissed, he would not trouble himself to hold his tongue in the matter. Masters are often at the mercy of their servants. Gontran knew this, and thought it best to come to terms. "Very well," replied he. "This time I will pass over it, but do not begin again, and remember to keep a silent tongue in your head."

"Has your lordship no need of me for your night toilet?" asked the valet obsequiously.

"I have already said that I do not require you. Leave me."

Francis feeling that his position was once more secure, bowed, and disappeared in the direction of the servants' staircase.

"The rogue," muttered Gontran, "he would be ready and willing to go to my father-in-law, and tell him that I was the lover of my wife's companion. Deuce take it, it would not be a judicious moment for me to quarrel with old Vacheron. I'll make a clean sweep of them all out of the house, when I have got the three hundred thousand francs, and I now know what steps to take to compel Valentine to ask for them, and so let me strike the iron while it is hot."

These few words exactly showed the steps that M. de Sartilly contemplated taking. He wished to profit by the state of mind in which he had left Valentine, to force her to consent to ask for the money from her father, and also to definitely assume the reins of government, and to hold as in a vice the charming woman who was unfortunate enough to be his wife. He had the whole plan cut and dried and ready for execution.

He quickly ascended the staircase, passed through the little drawing-room, then opened the bedroom door, and entered the room like an actor in a melodrama with these words on his lips, "And now, madame, for the settlement of our affairs." Nothing was wanting in either his gesture, his tone or his attitude. He was standing erect, with his arms crossed, and his brows bent, before the unhappy Valentine, who had not the strength to rise from the arm-chair into which she had cast herself when he left the room uttering those terrible words, "Remember that I have the right to kill you."

She believed that he had returned solely for the purpose of exercising this terrible right, which luckily the legislature only permits in circumstances very different to the present ones. Sartilly did not think of anything of the kind, all he wanted to do first was to frighten her so much that he could bring her to a point from which he could dictate his own conditions. He only succeeded too well in his designs.

"Do with me as you like," murmured the Countess in a suppressed voice.

"You confess then that you are guilty?" said he looking at her steadily.

"Never," answered she, "but I am the victim of a fatal combination of circumstances, against which I have not the courage to struggle."

"A man was in your room at three o'clock in the morning, and you call that a fatal combination of circumstances?"

"You know well enough that he was there without my knowledge, he must have told you that himself when you found him."

"The wretch managed to escape me."

Valentine did not dare to ask if he was wounded, although the fate of the unfortunate man interested her greatly, for had he not wished for death, sooner than compromise her good name. Gontran took care to say nothing to her on this matter, had he done so, it would have been necessary to have spoken of his visit to Diana de Ganges, and it was part of his plan to let his wife believe that the fugitive had succeeded in escaping from the grounds. "I pursued him, but he

could run more swiftly than I could," continued he, throwing himself into a chair opposite to Valentine, as though he were utterly exhausted. "And so," he went on, "there is at present in Paris, a scoundrel who can boast of having passed an hour alone with the Countess de Sartilly. Mind I do not say that he was your lover, but if he vaunts it how can I give him the lie? What am I to do? I ask you yourself, Valentine."

As he uttered that name, which he had never made use of since their estrangement, the young woman raised her head, and a gleam of hope shone in her eyes. "You must decide," murmured she. "I submit myself to your will."

"I ask you the question, because innocent or guilty, you have still, I presume, some regard for the honour of the name that you bear."

"Can it really be you who are speaking to me in this manner?" exclaimed Mme. de Sartilly, surprised and delighted.

"Believe me, that I should not speak to you thus had you become entirely indifferent to me. I have not forgotten the serious differences that have caused an estrangement between us for more than a year. I have already told you that your ideas of life and mine did not agree, and that little by little a coolness arose between us. You attributed this coldness to a dissimilarity of tastes, but I want you to understand that in this you deceived yourself. I have many and great faults, I confess, faults which I owe to the manner in which I was brought up. I have too much respect for, and pride in, the name I bear; and to speak frankly to you, I will confess that I hesitated much before I could bring myself to marry you. You were very wealthy, and I had run through nearly all my fortune, and it seemed to me that I should fall in the social scale if I made a mercenary marriage, and I never should have done so had I not loved you."

"Loved me!" repeated Valentine deeply affected.

"And if I did not love you, do you believe that I should have taken so tragic a view of the incident of to-night? Do you not understand that I could, like so many other husbands in the upper classes in which I move, live with you, as the greater portion of the men of my rank lived under the reign of Louis XV.? I should have closed my eyes to your doings, provided that you did not hamper mine. Perhaps it would have been the wisest course to have adopted, but my dream was to live happily with my wife. It is not an aristocratic idea, but no one is perfect."

All this was uttered with such an accent of half cynical sincerity that Valentine in a moment forgot the just causes of resentment that she had against her husband. "If all that you have said were only true!" murmured she softly.

"I never lie ; but do not deceive yourself as to the meaning of my words. I do not retract anything that I have said to you. I intended always to live like a gentleman of high birth and position, and to lead the life to which I am entitled. But beneath the Count de Sartilly there is a Gontran, a Gontran who loves you, and whose heart you have wounded deeply, for love is like honour, and the first blow aimed at it inflicts a mortal wound."

"And you suspect me of having deceived you ? And with whom, great Heavens, with some stranger ?"

"Listen to me, Valentine. Many strange things have passed here. I do not condemn you, but I cannot acquit you. I ask you for no explanations, for if you were guilty you would invent some falsehood in reply, and if you were innocent you would have no explanations to give, since you then would know nothing of the incident that has upset our life. I shall always have that scene before my eyes, and my pride revolts at the idea that I may by chance come across this man again, and, Valentine, I swear to you that should I ever obtain the proof that he has been your lover, I will kill you both."

"And you would act rightly," answered the Countess quickly ; "but it is not in my power to prove to you that such a thing could never happen."

"Perhaps it is," said her husband after a short silence.

"Speak then, and tell me what I must do to convince you. Would you like me to give you a written authorisation to kill me, should I ever deceive you ?"

"You would give me that ?" asked Gontran, with a smile.

"This instant."

"There is some originality in the idea, but I should not present this note of hand when it fell due ; you would let it be dishonoured, and you would be right. Besides, even supposing that I were mad enough to use the authority with which you had furnished me, I expect that it would cost me dear. The case has already been decided in court, and the man who kills his fellow creature by virtue of a written permission, has been, and ever will be, condemned as a murderer. So," continued he with a smile, "if you wish to re-assure me as to the future, you must find out some other means of doing so."

"Find one, and I agree to it in advance."

Gontran made a feint of reflecting, putting on the air of a man who is desirous of satisfying some whim on the part of a woman he loves, however absurd he may consider it.

"I think I have hit upon one," said he gaily.

"Tell me what it is."

"You really mean it, well and good; have you writing materials here?"

"There on that table."

The Count sat down at it and began to write; his wife rose from her seat and stood behind him.

"Read it," said he, when he had concluded.

With trembling fingers, she took the sheet of note-paper and read aloud:

"Life is a burden to me. I die voluntarily. Let no one be blamed for my death. Heaven will judge me."

"Well?" asked she.

"What, do you not understand that if I had such a paper as this written in your hand, and signed by you, that I could kill you whenever I liked and without any risk, for no one would suspect me of having sent you into the other world? I could choose what I liked—steel, fire, or poison."

Without answering a word, Valentine took her husband's place at the table, and unhesitatingly began to write, and signed the declaration which might prove to be her death warrant.

"Enough, dearest one," cried the Count, affecting to stay her hand. "It was a mere proof that I do not wish to push further."

"And I wish to carry the matter to the end," answered Valentine, in a firm tone. "For I am only too happy to prove to you that I am, and ever shall be, perfectly blameless," and she copied what he had written literally. Gontran had forgotten to put in the date; she did this, and handing him the paper, said calmly, "Take it."

And as he pretended to hesitate, she thrust into his breast-pocket this anticipated testament, which placed her life in his hands.

Then this high-born gentleman did the only thing which showed some appearance of genuine behaviour, he knelt down before her, took her hands in his, and covered them with kisses. He even managed to squeeze out a tear. "Never again," cried he. "I was mad to doubt you—but now I love you, I adore you."

"And you will never leave me again."

"Never."

"And see, you are in the room which you have deserted for twelve months," exclaimed the Countess pressing him to her heart, then her lips whispered into Gontran's ear, "will you remain with me?" And he remained, for he thought, "To-morrow I shall have the three hundred thousand francs from Daddy Vacheron."

CHAPTER V

THE SATIN COVERLET

SOME philosophers assert that love is only a certain form of madness, and perhaps they are not far out in making such a statement, but at any rate it is one that cures itself. We are unable to send back the woman that we have ceased to care for, as we can articles purchased in the shops, but we can abandon her. Even this cannot always be effected in married life. Man and wife who have taken a dislike to each other when the period of adoration is over, have no resource left them but the court of divorce, and many sooner than proceed to this extremity resign themselves to wear their chain which weighs so heavily on them, for the rest of their lives. The world knows nothing about it, and all they have to do is to suffer for the remainder of their existence unless indeed they seek for other consolations ; and ordinarily they do not deprive themselves of these. But love which has received the sanction of the law has also its pleasures, and the day after her reconciliation with her husband Mme. de Sartilly was the happiest of women. A brief period of happiness had made her forget months of misery. Gontran had left her in the morning assuring her of his undying love, and after his departure she had revelled in golden dreams. She had forgiven him everything, his neglect, his unkindness, his outrageous suspicions. She almost blessed the stranger who by his escalade of her window, had produced so happy a result. She was proud now that Gontran was not only her husband, but her lover. It was true that he had not made use of a balcony like Romeo, but he had come back to her of his own free will, and this unlooked for return on his part, had largely compensated her for all that she had suffered, since she had won him again for ever ; at least she believed so. What had he not sworn to her in the last few hours ? She believed in all his oaths, and it seemed to her as if she were about to commence a fresh existence. She vowed to herself that she would plunge into it headlong, that she would put on coquettish airs to please him, and as she hardly knew how to set about doing so, she determined to consult her dear Diana, and to learn from her the secret of how to charm.

When Valentine woke up she was still in the land of

dreams. It seemed to her as if the sky was of a deeper blue, the song of the birds more sweet as they flew from bough to bough, that the leaves upon the trees looked more fresh, and that the snow had disappeared, that snow upon which had been visible the blood-stained traces of a man who had braved death to save a woman from being surprised by her husband. She rang for the maid who had been for some time awaiting the summons. In general Valentine got up at a much more early hour, and the wily lady's-maid guessed the reason of her prolonged slumber. At the first peal of the bell she hurried to the room, and her mistress at once informed her that she was going that day to breakfast with her father. This had been arranged between Gontran and herself, for the former had not omitted to remind her of the sum of money which he required to start a racing stable, which he intended to do in partnership with his friend Viscount de Saint Senier.

"Had your ladyship breakfasted here, you would have done so alone," said Lisa; "for the Count went out on horse-back early, and told Francis that he would not be back until half-past twelve.

"Has Mme. de Ganges been here this morning?" asked Valentine.

"No, madame, I have not seen her."

"I will go to her rooms before I leave."

"What dress will madame wear?"

"The one I tried on the day before yesterday; I think that it suits me."

"Everything suits madame. The real effect of a dress is produced by the person who wears it. With a material of fifteen sous the yard madame would be better dressed than the Viscountess de Saint Senier with all her silks."

"Why do you speak to me of her?"

"Why, I do not know why. I saw her go into the Bois yesterday in her fine carriage, but oh, so detestably dressed."

"There is no need to tell me that," said Mme. de Sartilly going into her dressing-room. That day she was longer than usual over her toilet, and Lisa drew a happy augury for the future felicity of her mistress from it, and profited by her good humour to indulge in a little gossip; for the Countess without being too familiar did not decline to talk with her at times.

"Did your ladyship hear nothing last night?" asked she as she was assisting her mistress to dress.

"No," answered Valentine, rather astonished, and a little alarmed. "Why do you ask me?"

"Because there were some pistol shots in the Rue

Villejust ; I had just gone to sleep, and I woke up with a start, I was so frightened."

"Had any person been attacked near our house ?" asked Mme. de Sartilly putting on an air of indifference.

"I do not know, Francis went to the window, but he could see nothing. In my opinion it was not a robber, for nobody has been found, and besides the sound seemed to come from the side upon which the Saint Seniers live. The count often comes home very late, and perhaps——well perhaps he found someone in his house."

"I will not have you occupy yourself with what goes on in the neighbouring houses," returned the Countess coldly. "Assist me to dress."

Lisa obeyed her and devoted herself to her mistress's toilet : but she had easily perceived that Mme. de Sartilly was disturbed, and she inwardly determined to make Francis talk, for at present he had told her very little for fear of being dismissed by his master. In the height of her newly-formed happiness, Valentine had almost forgotten the nocturnal incident which had turned out so well for her. Lisa had recalled it to her mind all in a moment, and had explained in her own way by insinuating that the Count Saint Senier had fired on his wife's lover.

Her explanation might be a true one, and Valentine was the more willing to believe it for the reason that she did not like the Viscountess at all, who was an old coquette and had more than once wounded her by the high and mighty air that she assumed. But for all that Valentine was annoyed and almost alarmed at finding that her servants were commenting among themselves on the incidents of the night. She had made her peace with Gontran who had not told her the result of his man hunt, and she did not dare to question him further on the matter. She would have liked to have known what had become of the fugitive, that brave and courageous young man who knew so well how to sacrifice himself for a woman, and at the same time she wanted someone to whom she could confide her happiness, someone whom she could tell that Gontran had returned to her, and that her heart was overflowing with joy. And to whom could she entrust this joy so pure, and delightful, if not to the friend of her childhood, to that Diana de Ganges, who so little resembled her, and whom she yet loved with all a sister's affection.

This independent minded companion was no saint, but she was devoted body and soul to Valentine, and had never given anything but good advice to her former schoolmate, who had now become her benefactress, though she did not pretend to put herself forward as a model to be imitated.

She might have injured her in many ways, for she had long since perceived the feelings of the Count de Sartilly for her, and she had now acquired the proof that she had but to say the word to become the mistress of that shameless profligate.

But Valentine did not know of all this, and could think of nothing better than to take her into her confidence, and determined to go off to ask her advice at once, for she was not certain of finding her in her room after midday. Diana had the fullest liberty to come and go as she thought fit, and she would sometimes go out alone on horseback just as the fancy seized on her.

Valentine desired to see her before her husband's return, for in leaving her, he had promised to take her out to dinner to a restaurant, where they would dine together in a private room more like two lovers, than man and wife.

At ten o'clock she was ready to go out, and her victoria was waiting for her at the gate opening on the Avenue d'Eylau. Her father breakfasted at eleven o'clock, so she had plenty of time for a long talk with her friend. As may be conjectured it was not necessary to go into the garden to reach the apartments of Mlle. de Ganges, but merely to pass through the reception-rooms which opened into one another on the first floor of the mansion. Diana was waited on by the under lady's-maid, a young girl who was as it were serving her apprenticeship in the hopes of one day taking Lisa's place, and her duties were very light, for Mlle. de Ganges always dressed herself, and only employed her to "do the room," and wait at table when she desired to have her meals in private. Mme. de Sartilly was not much surprised at not finding this girl when she entered her companion's rooms, but what did surprise her was, that she found no one there at all. Diana generally occupied a little sitting-room opening into the lobby in which she had received the Count between three and four in the morning. She usually passed her time in reading novels, for she never did any work; she despised embroidery, crewel work, crotchet, and other feminine occupations; and when she did not read, she wrote. What was it that she wrote? Her thoughts on men, manners, and things? Perhaps so, for the Countess had often found her writing in a large book with a blue cover. But as Diana was not in her little sitting-room, Valentine presumed that she was in bed, and entered her chamber without knocking at the door. There her astonishment changed to stupefaction, the room was empty, and the bed had not been slept in. On the other hand, however, several of the drawers were wide open, amongst others a nest

of drawers of imitation Buhl work, in which Diana was in the habit of keeping her jewellery and private papers. All at once Valentine uttered a cry of horror; the coverlet of the bed, a coverlet of white satin, was absolutely drenched in blood.

CHAPTER VI

A SELF-MADE MAN

"THEY have murdered her," murmured the Countess. Indeed, the entire aspect of the chamber would have led to the conviction that Mlle. de Ganges had been murdered and robbed, for the whole room was in a terrible state of confusion, looking as if it had been sacked. Dresses had been flung here and there on the carpet, drawers were half opened. It seemed as if every spot had been ransacked for money or articles of value. Blood had been spilt on the coverlet, but nowhere else. Diana must have been struck as she reposed on the bed, but what had been done with her body? Valentine thought that the murderer might have dragged it into the dressing-room, and she had the courage to go in and look about her; but she found no signs of the corpse of her friend, nor traces of her murderer.

There was nothing either in the dining-room.

The murderer and his victim had both disappeared, as ghosts speed away with the first dawn of day. Terrified out of her life, the Countess did not remain long to seek for a solution of the mystery. Her first impulse was to fly from the terrible spot. Hardly knowing what she did, she ran down the staircase and threw open the door, which led into the garden, and came face to face with her husband's valet, Francis, who, stealthy as a wolf, had crept thither. When he caught sight of his mistress, he started and would fain have fled, but it was too late.

"Where is Mlle. de Ganges?"

"I—I do not know," stammered he.

Perhaps this was the very wretch who had committed the crime, and there was nothing to prevent his leaping upon her, and strangling her to prevent her repeating that she had caught him at Diana's door. All that she thought of now was how to free herself from his dangerous presence,

"Why have you come here?" asked she, nerving herself to speak calmly.

"I was looking for Rose, Mlle. Ganges' maid."

"She is not in her mistress's room. Go to your duties, you have no business here."

Francis hastened away, and the Countess had the courage to pass again through the rooms after locking the door opening into the garden, as well as those that had led into the reception-rooms, and taking all the keys with her, so as to be sure that no one in her absence could enter Diana's rooms. What could she do now? Call up the other servants. If she did so, she would have to enter into all those explanations which she was most anxious to avoid. Should she go and give notice to the Commissary of police? That would be worse again. He would institute an inquiry, and perhaps would end by discovering who had fired the pistol shots in the garden during the night. Besides, the strange disappearance of Mlle. de Ganges did not absolutely prove that she was dead. The blood with which the bed was drenched might not be hers after all, and the confusion in which the room was, might be the result of a hurried flight.

Why should Diana have fled away in such a manner like a guilty person who is escaping? Mme. de Sartilly could not solve this mystery, and asked herself if this new enigma had not something to do with the events of the past night. No doubt Gontran could throw some light on the matter, since he had darted off in pursuit of the handsome stranger. It was not likely that she would see him until much later in the day, but she had every faith in him, and she felt that he would be annoyed if she did anything without first consulting him. But before she could do so, she had a difficult mission to carry out as regarded her father, and she did not dare delay it as she was aware of its importance. The victoria was ready, she got into it, and drove off without returning to her own rooms, or without meeting either Francis, or Lisa, again.

The whole house had on its usual appearance, and no one could suspect that a strange and unheard-of horror had been acted in it the previous night.

A little re-assured by this apparent calm, the Countess said to herself, that she had taken fright too quickly, that doubtless all these strange events might be easily explained, and that all she had to do was to plead her husband's cause with her father. It was a nasty business to touch on, for the Count de Sartilly, in his position as her husband, had command of very large sums of money, and the need which he alleged he had for three hundred thousand francs was

not one that could be entertained. A rich man might make a sufficiently good appearance in society without starting a racing stable, and M. Vacheron, who had no interest in the improvement of the equine genus, would not feel much disposed to permit a sporting son-in-law to gratify his tastes at his expense.

Had Gontran's request been made a day before, Valentine would decidedly have refused to expose herself to certain refusal, but her husband had known how to overcome her reluctance, and his wishes were now perfect commands for his grateful wife. For him she would have encountered much greater risks, and besides she had still some hopes of success.

*Peter Cyprien Vacheron, the widower of a shop-girl, and the father of a Countess, lived in the first floor of a handsome house in the Rue de la Neva, a house which he had built for the purpose of letting but which he had never let. This arch millionaire was in the habit of building palaces and selling, but not of living in them himself. He would not have felt at home in them, for he had remained a tradesman to the tips of his fingers, and he had a horror of everything that had the slightest appearance of display. He lived without carriages, horses, or footmen; his establishment consisting of one old man-servant, and a venerable old lady who acted as his housekeeper, who had been in his service thirty years, and had therefore witnessed the birth of Valentine. There was the more credit in his leading so simple an existence, for he had begun life as a journeyman mason, and had made his fortune with great rapidity. He had not been intoxicated by his success, which was due entirely to his honesty and intelligence, and he was not one of those self-made men, who foolishly endeavour to disguise their humble origin, and in his whole disposition there was not a shadow of vice. His chief pleasure was to walk about in the new parts of the city, where he would stand and gaze on the buildings which had been erected by his enterprise and capital. All the love which his heart contained was concentrated on his daughter, and the only remorse that he felt was at not having married her as he desired. The marriage which he had dreamed of for her, would have been with some good steady fellow, well principled as his father-in-law, but better educated, and holding a superior position, for Daddy Vacheron felt keenly his want of education, and Valentine who had been brought up in one of the best schools in Paris, with most aristocratic surroundings, would not have been happy with an ex-workman. But this prince of son-in-laws did not present himself at the time, and unfortunately

Valentine fell madly in love with a Count in embarrassed circumstances whom she had met in a house where she occasionally visited. The ex-contractor had made a stout resistance, but he had ended by yielding to the entreaties of his daughter, and he never ceased regretting having done so. Thus runs the world along, and fathers who yield too readily find their punishment in it.

His only compensation was that Valentine never ceased to love him, and continually paid him visits, for he seldom came to his son-in-law's house except on grand occasions, and then much against his inclination. For some months past Valentine had not seen him so frequently, because she feared lest he should divine that her married life was not a happy one, and she wished if possible to hide it from him. But to-day she could show herself with a clear conscience for she was brimming over with happiness, and she calculated that her appearance as a happy wife would assist her in obtaining what she required. Eleven o'clock chimed from the belfry of the Russian church, as she sprang from her victoria. She knew that her father set great store on punctuality, and she had timed herself exactly so as to put him in a good humour. She found him waiting in the dining-room watching the clock so as to sit down to table at the proper moment. Peter Vacheron was a well-preserved man of sixty years of age, who did not look more than fifty, tall, stoutly-built, with a high colour, his features which were framed by grey beard and whiskers were regular, and his expression was a pleasant one. In his dress he did not follow the fashion, but he was excessively neat, and always wore a black frock coat, and neck-tie, grey trousers, and boots with thick soles, and square toes.

"Ah, here thou art!" cried he, advancing to embrace his daughter, who gave him her two cheeks to kiss, one after the other. "This time thou art punctual. Ah, I know well enough when thou art late that it is the fault of my fine son-in-law. But never mind since thou art here. Sit down opposite to me, my dear child, and let us breakfast, for I am dying of hunger."

Valentine took her seat, well-pleased to find him in such a good temper, but watching anxiously for a favourable moment at which to open the important question.

"Thou mayest not have such a grand breakfast as at thine own house, but at any rate thou wilt not have a great lanky fellow in livery behind thy chair. Thou hast I suppose got accustomed to it, but I never could, it takes away my appetite."

"Is that why you come so seldom to see me?" asked Madame de Sartilly with a smile.

"Partly because of that, and partly because of the fine manners of thy husband, he always seems to me as if he had just come back from the Crusades. Then I hate to hear him say *you*, and not *thou*——"

"It is the custom of the society in which he moves."

"I don't care a rap for custom. Thou also sayest *you*, and I cannot get accustomed to such fashions. When husband and wife love each other, my little one, they say 'thee' and 'thou,' remember. Thy poor mother would have been much hurt had I not said 'thou' to her."

"I assure you, my dear father, people can say 'you,' and yet love each other very dearly."

"Oh yes, *parbleu*, I know thou lovest this noble Count, and I blame thee not for doing so, but I am far from sure that he does the same to thee. You know that there have been clouds on the marriage horizon."

"The clouds have all fled, and the glass is set at fair, whilst I, am the happiest of women."

"Then I will forgive him for flinging his money out of window."

Valentine trembled, for this allusion to the prodigalities of her husband did not look well for the success of the loan that she was going to ask for from her father.

"And yet, my darling," continued M. Vacheron, "the last time that thou camest to breakfast with me, thou wert not so satisfied with thy husband's conduct to thee. Thou didst not complain, but then thee never does so, only I could see from thy face that thou wert not happy. Thine eyes were red, and there were all the signs of weeping about thee."

"I shall never have cause to weep again," returned Valentine quickly.

"All the better, for if I again see that thou art unhappy, I shall get angry once and for all, not with thee, but with that noble Count, who has considered that he has done thee too much honour in espousing thee. It was thy wish, but he must take measures for thy happiness, and if he does not——"

"I assure you, my dear father, that Gontran is kindness itself to me."

"Thou defend'st him, thou art too good, but I distrust a man who spends his days in racing stables, and his nights in gambling clubs."

"Not all his nights. Yesterday, for instance, he took me to a ball at Madame de Muire's, and we did not get home until this morning."

"Yes, that was just once in a way. It appears to me that he generally comes home at the time when I am getting up,

Is that the right life for a husband to lead? That is not the way to have a family of young children."

His daughter blushed at this rather broad remark.

"Thou art very foolish to permit him to treat thee in such a manner. What I want is grandchildren to dandle on my knees, but it seems that this is no longer the fashion, but what do I care for the world? I want to be a grandfather."

"And I hope that you will be one soon," murmured the young woman.

"The sooner the better, for too much time has been wasted. Three years have elapsed since thou becamest Madame de Sartilly, and I will not have things continue like this. On my word I shall some day get into a rage, marry again, and have another family on purpose to vex my son-in-law," continued the ex-contractor with a hearty laugh.

Valentine felt that her father was right, but his manner wounded her. In the society in which she moved, people knew how to hide their sentiments in polished language, and to wrap up plain speeches in a refined envelope. Vacheron who was a self-made man spoke his thoughts out freely, like an honest fellow who does not allow himself to be ruled by the customs of society.

"Do you think, my dear father, that Gontran is not anxious to have an heir to his name and title?" asked Madame de Sartilly.

"His name and title! Ah, there thou goest. He has made thee see through his glasses, this fine gentleman. Now thou talkest exactly as he does. My name is a thousand times more respectable than his is, my girl. Dost thou understand that? His ancestors were nobles, and mine labourers, well—what of that? It is the chance of birth that has made *him* what he is, whereas *I* owe all to myself, and I think that that is a much grander thing. Try to remember this lesson, my daughter."

"As heaven is my witness, my dear father, I will not forget it, but surely a woman is permitted to defend her husband?"

These words were uttered with an air of such frank simplicity that Vacheron's heart softened at once, for he adored his daughter, and would have given all he was worth to have spared her from annoyance.

"Well, well," answered he pleasantly, "do not be vexed, my little one, if my son-in-law is going to turn over a new leaf, I will forgive him with all my heart for the trouble that he has caused thee. And so thou tell'st me that since thy last visit here, things have been going on smother at home."

"Gontran has come back to me."

"Very gracious of him indeed. Why thou art as pretty as a Venus, as good as gold, and as full of sense as an egg is of meat. If thy husband does not appreciate all thy good qualities, it is because he is short-sighted. And so he has come back to thee, good, we will see if he will remain."

"I will endeavour to keep him always now."

"It is his duty to try and please thee. Ah, my poor child, hadst thou but listened to me, thou wouldst not have been in such a plight. When I think that thou couldst have married that worthy Henri Trévières. He was one of those that loved thee, and was made for thee. The son of an architect, intelligent, laborious, rich by what he inherited from his father, and with every chance of becoming much more so, a civil engineer who has passed the college. Thou art going to tell me that he is not a count, eh?"

"No father, I have no particular love for a title, but I am very fond of Gontran, as you well know."

"Thou hast an answer for everything, little puss," returned Vacheron, with a fond smile. "Besides what is done is done. Let us speak of something else, how dost thou like this mutton stew, which Bridget has cooked for us. I will lay a wager that thy man cook could not make one like it. Thou use'st to eat it with a good appetite formerly."

"And so I do now, it is delicious."

M. Vacheron became more good-tempered, and recalled to his daughter's recollection tales of the days when she was still a child. Madame de Sartilly followed the line of conversation that her father had commenced, and the breakfast proceeded more calmly than it had begun. Valentine, however, was not oblivious of her real mission, and she could not restrain her mind from wandering back to it, for it seemed to her as if the prospect of procuring the loan that Gontran desired was more and more doubtful.

She endeavoured to pave the way to it, by leading the conversation to the cost of living in Paris, and the great expense which her husband had to meet in keeping up a large and expensive house. But the ex-contractor turned a deaf ear to what she said, and when she persisted, he broke out suddenly :

"Thou hast come to ask me for money?"

"Not for myself," returned Valentine rashly.

"*Parbleu* ! I knew that. What then has thy fine gentleman of a husband done that he finds himself in difficulties with an income of three hundred thousand francs a year. Has he been gambling?"

"No, father."

"Then he has been losing on the turf, it is the same thing."

"There are no races in the winter."

"That may be so, I know nothing about racing ; I hate and detest it. A fine invention it is indeed, all the mashers and dandies are now going in for the amelioration of the equine genus. That is the way in which they ruin themselves. And if they were the only ones that did so it would not matter, but the tradesmen follow their example, and so do the clerks and the mechanics. I recollect a year ago, I went to the races at Longchamps, and came back with a sore heart. I saw thee there, my girl. I was a long way from thee. I cannot understand what amusement thou couldst find there."

"Not much, father, but since Gontran goes there——"

"He goes into many other places where thou canst not put thy foot, thank heaven ! and he does not succeed on the *turf* as they call it. Why, I recollect last year in the month of June, how my gentleman had lost seven thousand five hundred louis on one horse. He counted it by louis, but for all that it was a hundred and fifty thousand francs, and I ought to know for I was ass enough to pay it for him."

Terrified at this sudden outburst against racing, Valentine bent down her head, and kept silence.

"There, I have got angry ; I am always doing the wrong thing," continued Vacheron, "but I cannot help it, my temper always gets the better of me, and it is a relief to let it come out ; but now I am quite calm. Let me know what thou wantest, little one ; how much is it that my son-in-law desires to borrow."

Valentine saw at once that it would be best for her to mention the amount, and her father did not flinch at the formidable total. "Dost know," demanded he coldly, "how long I took to get together the first three hundred thousand francs that I possessed ? It took me twenty years, and I began work at fifteen. I was a mortar mixer, and supplied the masons. I have at times worked sixteen hours a day, and took two out of my night's rest to gain the knowledge that I was deficient in. Now, I have a dozen millions, without counting what I gave thee on thy marriage, and I tell thee that I did not gain them too easily."

"No, certainly not," stammered Valentine, "but you have them now."

"And dost thou think that I could not put them to a better use than to give them to a vicious idler, who will squander them. Well then, I say No. I am not mean, and I have proved it to thee. If to-morrow I lost all that I had, I

would go back to my work without a word of complaint, but I have the right, and I feel it my duty to protect thee against the extravagances of this man."

"Father, I entreat you, Gontran has not lost his money at play, and if he wants this money it is to employ it in business——"

"In what sort of business?"

Valentine remained silent. Her power of speech failed her, for after what her father had said, it was impossible for her to tell him that her husband wanted the money to run horses with.

"I see," continued he, "that thou darest not tell me, and I do not want to know. If he wants the money let him take it from thy income, since unhappily it passes through his hands. The law should be altered, but as it stands, it still protects thee. I congratulate myself upon the precautions that I had taken in drawing up thy settlement. Thou art entirely under the influence of this man, and thou wouldst permit him to rob you of every sou. But I took proper care thy house cannot be mortgaged without thy consent, thy fortune is in shares in thine own name, which he cannot sell. Therefore thou art safe, only he has the power of influencing thee for evil, and is capable of finding out some means of robbing you of your fortune. I distrust him and also thy weakness of character. Swear to me that thou wilt never sign any papers without first consulting me."

"You are unjust to Gontran," answered Mme. de Sartilly deeply wounded. "He may perhaps have his faults, but he would never influence me to do anything of the kind."

She forgot that the evening before, her husband had done much worse in persuading her to put her name to a document which gave him the power to kill her with perfect impunity; and even had she remembered it, she would have attached no importance to it, for she had copied the strange declaration dictated by the Count without seeing anything in it but a feeling of jealousy, which proved his love for her, and she had flung the copy of it, in Gontran's hand-writing, carelessly into the drawer of a table in her bedroom. She only thought now of the reception that he would accord her when she would have to tell him of her father's distinct refusal, whose heart however she had still hopes of softening, for he often began by scolding and ended by yielding. She was trying to think of some method of touching this sensitive chord, when M. Vacheron's old man-servant half-opened the door, and without the slightest ceremony observed:

"Henri Trévières is here, and wants to see you. Is he to come in?"

CHAPTER VII

A STORMY INTERVIEW

THE Count de Sartilly would certainly have dismissed on the spot any servant of his who ventured to introduce a visitor during the breakfast hour, but M. Vacheron was not so particular, and treated his old domestic more in the light of a friend than of a servant.

"What do you mean?" exclaimed he. "Let him come in at once, Valentine and I will be delighted to see him."

Evidently Valentine did not agree with her father on this point, for a dark shadow passed across her face. This unexpected visit of M. Trévières was most distasteful to her, as it would prevent her following up the question of the loan for her husband, and she had not forgotten that the evening before, previous to their reconciliation, her husband had bitterly reproached her for having waltzed too often with this young man. However much annoyance she felt however, she could not get up and leave, for the hope of softening her father's heart kept her stationary in her place.

"Welcome, my dear Henri," cried M. Vacheron as the young man entered the room. "Thou didst not expect to find my daughter with me?"

"It is indeed a pleasure which I had not anticipated," answered Trévières, bowing respectfully to Mme. de Sartilly.

"But what good wind has blown thee hither?"

"I came on a business matter, but I see that the time is unfavourable, besides there will be no inconvenience to me in putting it off until to-morrow."

"Not a bit of it, I have no secrets from Valentine. Sit ye down, my dear boy, thou wilt take thy coffee with us?"

Half against his own wishes, and to the great annoyance of the Countess, Trévières took his seat.

He was a handsome young fellow of about thirty, of a good figure, and well-proportioned, and with a pleasing expression. He was as dark as Gontran was fair, and had not perhaps such an aristocratic air in the narrow sense of the expression, but his appearance was more manly and open. You had only to glance at him for an instant to perceive that he was an honourable and upright man, incapable of deviating from his duty.

"I am always at your orders, my dear sir," said he, bowing. "But you must permit me to enquire if Mme. de Sartilly does not feel fatigued after the ball at which I had the honour to meet her last night?"

"What! dost thou go to balls?"

"Not very often certainly. I have not the leisure, and this was the first time that I had received an invitation from the Marchioness de Muire."

"At a marchioness's too, and canst thou find any pleasure in such society? enquired M. Vacheron.

"I enjoyed myself very much yesterday," answered Trévières, with a side-long glance at Valentine, who answered coldly, "I thank you, monsieur, I was a little tired, but a few hours' sleep set me up completely, and I never felt better than I do now."

The expression of her face contradicted her words, her cheeks were pale, and her eyes sunken. Trévières had loved her passionately before her marriage with the Count, and was deeply grieved at her appearance, however he said nothing in reply, but addressed M. Vacheron.

"You must not imagine, my dear friend," said he, "that I have given myself up entirely to society. I got my invitation to this ball by a mere chance. The Marquis de Muire is the chairman of the board of the railway company for which I was working last year——?"

"Ah, then it was he that sent thee the invitation? But hast thou left the service of the company?"

"The work which I was superintending is finished."

"Hast thou found any other employment?"

"I have, and it was precisely on account of that, that I came here to have a talk with you."

"Well speak then, thou dost not find my daughter in the way?"

"Certainly not, I only fear to bore Mme. de Sartilly in explaining to you the employment that has been offered me."

Valentine made a sign in the negative, and her father exclaimed, "Go on Henri, she must get used to hear business matters discussed, that will teach her perhaps to attend to her own."

This rough speech brought the colour to the cheeks of the Countess, who began to feel very uncomfortable.

"Since you desire it then, this is the business in question," began Henri Trévières bowing to the Countess, as though to excuse himself for discussing a business matter before her. "A very wealthy landowner in the department of Seine et Marne, wishes to start a horse-breeding establishment on his estate."

"What, horses again?" growled the good man, who held the whole race in detestation, especially after having had to pay a hundred and fifty thousand francs, which his son-in-law had lost by backing the favourite for the Grand Prix.

"This gentleman will form a stud farm, where he will breed horses, so as to fill his own training stables."

"That is but another way of going headlong to ruin; but what hast thou to do with all this?"

"You shall hear. The soil is excellent, and the buildings are erected, but there is a scarcity of water, or at least there is not enough for the requirements of the stud. It is therefore proposed that I should undertake the sinking of three artesian wells. It will be a long job, and a very important one, and a kind of business which I thoroughly understand."

"Good, my boy, good! And now as to the remuneration?"

"Nothing could be better. I shall be royally paid, and if I succeed I shall receive a handsome bonus."

"Then I advise thee to close with the offer; that is of course after having made enquiries as to the solvency of thy employer."

"Oh! there is no fear about that. He is enormously wealthy, and in this speculation he will have a partner almost as rich as himself."

"Good, but get as much money as you can in advance, for I have an idea that these two idiots will squander their capital. What are their names? Perhaps I know them."

"I have not yet heard the partner's name, but the landowner with whom I have been in correspondence is named Viscount de Saint Senier."

"Why, he is my daughter's neighbour!" exclaimed Vacheron.

"Yes, now I remember, his house is only separated from that of M. de Sartilly by the Rue Villejust," replied Trévières.

"He is very intimate with my son-in-law," said the contractor, looking steadily at Valentine. At the commencement of this conversation she had trembled with affright when the young engineer spoke of a gentleman who was about to start a training stable. When he mentioned M. de Saint Senier's name, her countenance fell, so that her father guessed everything. "Come, daughter mine," said he bluntly, "this partner of thy neighbour's is to be thy husband, eh?"

"I—I do not know," stammered the Countess.

"Come, do not lie, for that will do thee no good with me. Confess that it was to carry out this fine project that thy

husband sent thee here to ask for money." Then, as with a sign of her hand she indicated the presence of Henri Trévières, he continued: "Henri is the son of my best friend, and it is I who have brought him up. There is no need for me to be particular before him, or to refrain from speaking about your home affairs."

"Father, I entreat you!"

"Thou mayest entreat as much as thou likest. I should like this worthy Henri to know how matters stand, and to let him know that this noble lord wants to run his English racers with my money. This shall be thy punishment. Yes, my dear boy, this fine gentleman sends my daughter here to ask me to lend, which means to give him, three hundred thousand francs! What dost thou say to that, eh?"

"M. Vacheron," replied Henri in a decided tone, "I do not desire to know what M. de Sartilly does, and therefore I will take my leave of you."

"Here, stop a bit, thou shalt know, if it was only to prevent thee from counting on my son-in-law's guarantee; for I declare to you that he shall not have a sou from me."

"I have no intention of working for him, believe me," answered M. Trévières coldly, "and when M. de Sartilly learns from M. de Saint Senier the name of the proposed engineer, I am sure that he will beg him to make choice of another one, so that you see I am quite a disinterested party. I can only sincerely regret that I spoke of the matter at all, as it has caused annoyance to your daughter." As he spoke, Henri Trévières rose to his feet, and with a bow to Valentine, into which he endeavoured to throw an expression of all the regret he felt, he left the room without another word. Poor Valentine, who could not help feeling grateful to him for his tact, was left face to face with her father, whose temper had now entirely got the better of him, the more so that he felt he had been utterly in the wrong. "Alas, thou hast made me do a nice stroke of business," said he. "Here I have quarrelled with a lad that I loved like my own son—and all on account of a man that I hate."

"And that I adore," replied Valentine, looking him steadily in the face.

"Thou darest to say that to me; has he then bewitched you, the wretch. He uses thee as a tool to get money out of me with; thou art a mere slave, subservient to his will and pleasure; he will not succeed in ruining thee, because I will take care of that, but he will end by beating thee. He will bring his mistresses to thy house. Look you, I am but an old man, but if I was as young as Henri Trévières I would go and strike this fine gentleman, who tramples thee under

his feet, in the face, and we would see then if he would dare to refuse to fight with me because I am not of noble birth."

"Father," interrupted Valentine, "I am your daughter, and you have the right to say to me what you like, but I am also the wife of Gontran de Sartilly, and I will not listen to any insults which you may cast at him. Permit me, therefore, to leave you."

"Good, be off," retorted the exasperated old man. "He is no doubt waiting for thee somewhere to pocket my money. Go to him and tell him from me that I would not give him a thousand franc note to save him from the galleys."

Thoroughly disheartened, the Countess fled, and Vacheron made no effort to detain her. She put on her hat and her fur cloak, which she had left in the ante-room, and quitted her father's house without knowing whether she should ever enter it again.

Her victoria was standing near the door, and she was about to get into it, when she saw Henri Trévières standing on the pavement close by, and who was evidently waiting for her. Valentine trembled, and her first idea was to get away, so as to avoid an explanation which she dreaded; but Trévières' expression showed so plainly the deep and honourable affection that he had for her, that she could not find it in her heart to refuse to listen to what he had to say to her.

"Madame," began he in a tone and manner which at once re-assured her as to his object, "I only wish to say a few words to you. I have been the involuntary witness of a scene which must have caused you deep sorrow, and I much pain. But you are too excited by what has just passed for me to detain you to listen to my apologies. You know me too well to think that I am about to speak to you regarding the sentiments that you have inspired in my heart. Chance has made me acquainted with the fact that your marriage, which destroyed all my earthly chance of happiness, has not conduced to yours. I foresee for you a gloomy future. I have no consolation to offer you, but you may one day have need of a trusty friend; let me then be that friend, if you will accept me as such." Then as Valentine hesitated to reply, he continued: "Whatever may happen, it matters not where or how, should you require a champion, summon me. I will fly to your side, and if I can serve you I shall find sufficient reward in so doing."

"I accept your generous offer," returned the Countess, extending her hand. Trévières pressed those slender fingers, which he would willingly have kissed, and hastened away. There had been no witness to this brief interview. The

coachman, who sat upright on the box, with the handle of his whip resting on his knee, after the fashion of a coachman in aristocratic employ, never turned his head.

"Home," said the Countess, before she got into her carriage, "go by the Bois de Boulogne, as far as the lakes, and return by the gate of La Muette."

Madame de Sartilly had a reason for suggesting this route. Since her interview with her father she was not in such a hurry to see her husband, as she did not quite know how he would take the news of her failure. She might have known that M. Vacheron would have refused her, but she had buoyed herself up with hope. She had now to tell Gontran that she had not succeeded in the mission which she had so imprudently undertaken, and instead of being angry with the man who had forced it upon her, she was vexed with herself for not having carried it out. She was seeking for some excuse, and she hoped to hit upon one before returning home and meeting Gontran, who was no doubt waiting for her.

The ex-contractor was right. Valentine was the abject slave of the Count, and she would probably pay dearly for the honour of having married him. She therefore wanted time to prepare her justification, and she calculated on a drive to restore to her that peace of mind which she required to plead her cause before one who was likely to prove a biassed judge.

CHAPTER VIII

AN ARISTOCRATIC HUSBAND

THAT day there appeared to be a break in the winter. The sun was shining in a cloudless sky, a pale February sun, which did not melt the snow, but which gilded the leafless summits of the trees. This was not the hour in which all Paris shows itself in the Bois. The male and female equestrians, who ride in the morning from ten to eleven, had returned home, and the carriages which at that time of the year block up the roads from three until five, had not yet arrived. The Allée des Poteaux was deserted, and only a few pedestrians and cabs were making the round of the lakes. Valentine therefore met with nothing that could disturb her reflections. Her thoughts were not pleasant ones, but she

hoped that Gontran would forgive her failure in the effort that she had made in obedience to his wishes. The recollection of his words and kindness to her the night before re-assured her. "No," said she to herself, "he would never have played such an ignoble part as to swear that he loved me as he had done at the commencement. All his passionate love and his promises were sincere. Love like that cannot be feigned. Besides, why should he deceive me? To persuade me to ask my father for money? No, that would be too vile a thing. No gentleman could descend so low."

On arriving at the end of the first lake, the coachman had imagined that he was conforming to the wishes of the Countess by slackening his speed, and so the victoria with the horses at a walk moved slowly along the broad macadamised road. The air was soft, and almost warm, and Valentine gazed listlessly at the occasional passers-by, when, suddenly, she saw two horsemen come out of one of the side rides. One she knew by sight, from having occasionally met him in society, but she did not recollect his name. The other was her husband, and as she did not wish to enter into the matter with him in such a place, she threw herself hastily back in the carriage in the hope that he would not see her. But Gontran had keen eyes. He saw his wife in a moment, and took leave of his companion, who trotted off in the direction of Paris, then making a sign to the coachman to stop, he came straight up to the carriage. He still looked as loving as ever, and Valentine's fears began to clear away. He came up to her with a smile on his lips, and forced his horse, which was almost a thoroughbred, and whose restiveness he controlled with the hand of a finished horseman, up to the side of the carriage. "What good fortune!" exclaimed he gaily. "It was a happy inspiration on my part to have breakfasted at the Restaurant Madrid with that madcap Alfred de Mussidan, who has just left me. I did not expect for a moment to meet you here, and I was going home to wait for you, for I thought that the breakfast at your father's would be a long one."

"It is just finished," murmured the Countess.

"Just so, and I guess that all went off well—and as you are now here, I propose a walk by the side of the lake, like true lovers."

Valentine took care to offer no opposition. She felt that the conversation with her husband would not pass over without some outburst, but it was necessary to put an end to a state of things which was beginning to weigh heavily upon her. She got out of the carriage, and Gontran, calling a boy who was hanging about in quest of a job, confided his horse

to him. "Jean will wait for us here," said the Count. "Come, my love."

He led her across a little grass plot into a narrow path that runs close to the lake, a path in which it is difficult for two to walk without pressing close to each other. "What a time for love," whispered the Count, drawing close to his wife. "Have you forgotten our wedding tour ; the Lake of Bourget, and those sweet evenings when we sat side by side on its banks ? Here it is not quite the same, for we lack mountain scenery in the Bois de Boulogne."

"My heart is not changed," murmured Valentine.

"Nor mine, I swear it to you."

Valentine trembled ; it was long since Gontran had spoken to her so affectionately. He had only done so again on the night of their reconciliation, and she imagined that she saw before her a happy future. "It only depends on you, for us to spend an eternal honeymoon," continued the most loving of husbands. "It will be a perpetual Spring."

A little more, and Valentine would have sprung into his arms ; as it was, she contented herself with pressing close to him, and they walked thus for some time in silence.

She was too happy at finding him near her to revert to the unpleasant subject of the loan. She hoped or rather she endeavoured to hope, that Gontran had given up all thoughts of it. Perhaps he had renounced his idea of partnership with the Viscount de Saint Senier, whom he did not much like, and would easily console himself for his father-in-law's refusal. Then she thought whether she ought to tell him of this refusal, and reproached herself with having hidden it from him so long. It seemed to her almost indelicate to remain silent at this happy moment, when he was lavishing caresses on her, which she feared she did not deserve. "I saw my father," began she, timidly.

"And he received you with open arms, I am sure," interrupted Gontran. "He loves you so fondly that I can forgive him all his little peculiarities. You told him, I suppose, the great news of our reconciliation."

"Yes, dearest, and he was overwhelmed with joy, but——"

"It was the best way to put him in a good temper. You are an ambassadress of the first class. I suppose you had not to ask him twice ?"

Valentine became more and more embarrassed, and hesitated to reply.

"What is the matter ?" asked the Count, with a frown. "Did the old fellow make any objection ?"

"He refused point blank," murmured the young woman.

"Ah!" exclaimed Sartilly, changing his tone and manner, "then you must have gone the wrong way to work."

"I did my best, but he said 'No' at once, and when he heard that the money was destined to start a racing stable with, he fell into a furious passion."

"What need was there to tell him anything of the kind? You should have said that it was a debt of honour, or a bill that must be taken up."

"It was not I that spoke of your project of running horses. There was one of his friends——"

"And you spoke of my necessities before him!" exclaimed the Count. "You unhappy wretch, but how like you that was. The disposition of the enriched mason breaks out in you, and your marriage with me has not cleansed you from the mire of the plebeian. The idea of you letting my name down like that!"

Gontran was pallid with fury. He seized his wife by the arm, and shook her violently. The place where they were standing was very lonely, and the weeping willows hid the opposite bank. There was not a boat on the lake, for they are seldom used during the winter, and the carriage road was some distance off.

The Count glared like a tiger on his wife. The bank was very steep; one thrust of his arm would have hurled his wife into the lake, and no one would have witnessed the deed. She had no strength left to call for help. She was terrified, but did not think of asking for mercy. What mattered it now whether she died or not, when her husband had just torn away the last veil that hid the truth from her. She would have preferred another style of death, but she was resigned to her fate; as well sleep her last sleep in the depths of the lake, as live at the mercy of a villain whom she still loved.

He did not push his cruelty so far as to hurl her into the water. In his passion, the desire to do so had flashed across his brain, but an instant's reflection showed him that he could do better with his victim than drown her.

"Thank heaven that you are a woman," said he, pushing her violently from him, "and remember that from this moment all is over between us. I have forgiven you once, and it was for the last time. And now we shall live once more, as we have lived for more than a year, and no one is to know what has taken place between us, not even your father, do you understand? I have nothing to do with the millions of that upstart of a father of yours, and I once more take my liberty, but I do not give you yours. You will go with me into society when I think fit, and you will only receive

such visitors as I choose. Should you receive any man by the window, it will cost you dear, so you had better keep it closed. You will receive no more of M. Vacheron's friends. You bear my name, and you shall not soil it by mixing with such people. I shall weed out my establishment from to-day. I shall dismiss your maid, and replace her with one of my own choosing. As for your money matters, I shall make no change. A certain sum will, as heretofore, be given to you for your dress and the housekeeping expenses. You need trouble about nothing more. I shall use your fortune as I please, and shall render an account of it to no one. Do you understand?"

"Yes," answered Valentine, who did not for a moment think of disputing the conditions that her unworthy husband was imposing on her.

"Then all that you have to do is to obey me; I shall conduct you to your carriage, and then leave you, most likely for a long time. Come along," he added, pointing to the path by which they had come. She moved on without uttering a word, and he followed her. "Oh! by the way," continued he, as they arrived in sight of the victoria, which was drawn up by the side of the road, "I forgot to tell you that you were not to keep your companion any longer."

"Diana?" murmured the Countess.

"Yes, Diana de Ganges, that pensioner of yours that you took up, I do not know why, and who never gives you anything but bad advice. You will send her off as soon as possible."

"This order is useless for she has disappeared."

"What do you mean?"

"I went to her room this morning, she was not there. I found everything upset, and her bed covered with blood."

Gontran was not surprised at this; he had felt sure that she had sheltered the wounded man, and he remembered that she had told him that she would leave the house the next day. He thought to himself "I shall find her again," and then continued aloud, "Oh! so she has gone, all the better!"

"Perhaps she has been murdered."

"Murdered, pooh, pooh, those sort of girls do not let themselves be murdered. She has run off with some lover. You will soon see her lolling in her carriage like the rest of them. But remember, I forbid you ever to speak to her again, or ever to recognise her, even if she should presume to bow to you." The scoundrel thought to himself "I shall find her again, and then she shall pay for her insolence, when she has joined the votaries of Venus, she will not be so haughty towards me."

He had chosen his plan, and settled on the course that he would pursue, now that M. Vacheron's refusal had placed him in a fresh position, and poor Valentine had only just begun to experience all the humiliations that were reserved for her. "I have nothing further to say to you," continued he, "and henceforth we shall not see each other often. But remember that I shall keep an eye on you, and shall know all you do ; therefore set a watch on your acts, yes, and on your very words, if you want to live at peace with me."

The victoria was in waiting. Gontran politely handed his wife in, and after having pressed her unwilling hand so that the coachman might believe that concord and harmony reigned between them, he sprang on his horse and set off for Paris at a hand gallop.

CHAPTER IX

IN SEARCH OF A LOVER

"HOME, by the shortest way," had been the order given by the Countess before getting into her carriage, and the coachman drove off at once. She felt that she had no longer the courage to struggle against her inexorable destiny. The blow which she had just received had been a terrible one, the more so, because it fell on her at the very moment when she thought that she had again won Gontran's affection. She had now no hope left in the world. Repulsed by her father, cursed and threatened by her husband, all she could pray for now was that death might speedily end her sufferings. She absolutely regretted that the Count had not cast her into the lake. As soon as she arrived at home, she hastened to seek refuge in her own room, where she might weep undisturbed, but she found her maid waiting for her there. After misfortunes came annoyances. Lisa was too much attached to her, and in obedience to M. de Sartilly's ideas it was necessary to dismiss her. Other women in Valentine's position would have resisted the tyrannical will of husbands, who desired that all should yield before their caprices, and had she but had a little more energy she would at once have quitted the house in which she was to be practically a prisoner, for irritated as her father might have been with her, he would certainly have given her an asylum. But she had resigned herself to obey Gontran's orders, for she thought that per-

haps perfect submission might touch his heart. For the moment she hardly knew how to tell Lisa that she could no longer retain her in her service, but the experienced waiting-maid relieved her from her embarrassment.

"Madame is no doubt acquainted with the fact that the Count has discharged me?" asked she.

"The Count!" repeated Valentine; "what, have you seen him?"

"He has just left here, madame; he came up directly he dismounted; he did not remain long, only to tell me that I was to leave at once."

"It is not I who am discharging you," said the Countess quickly.

"Oh, no! I know that very well; and I know why the Count is doing so, but I beg that madame will not be uneasy with regard to me. I shall certainly leave here to-day, but I shall be entirely at madame's orders, for I shall not go into service again at present. I have saved some money, thanks to madame's kindness, and I have no need to go out again. If madame will permit me, I shall take a little lodging in a house opposite to the gate leading into the Avenue d'Eylau; and any time that I can be of service to madame, never mind in what way, she has but to summon me."

"Thanks, thanks," answered Valentine, deeply touched at this faithful girl's devotion.

"Then madame accepts my offer. I do not know who will take my place, but I can only warn madame to distrust Francis. He is on the Count's side, and consequently against us. Fortunately, I have a hold on him, for he is courting me, so that I shall be able to prevent him doing much harm, and if there is any plot against madame, I shall know of it through him. He has already begun talking this morning."

"About what?"

"About Mlle. de Ganges; he pretends that someone was in her room last night, and as no one has seen her since yesterday——"

"Then she has not made her appearance?"

"No, madame, her room is locked, and Rose, her maid, does not know what to think."

At this instant a footman entered with a silver salver on which was a letter, the Countess took it, saying in a low voice, "It is from her."

Before breaking the seal, she sent Lisa out of the room, who had heard her exclamation, but who like a well-trained servant at once followed the footman. It was not without a feeling of the deepest emotion that Mme. de Sartilly

opened the letter from Mlle. de Ganges. The exciting events of the morning had caused her momentarily to forget the strange disappearance of her companion, but now she felt that this disappearance had something to do with the events which so strangely affected her, and she asked herself if Diana whom she had so much loved, was now a friend or an enemy. The letter would clear up the matter.

"MY DEAR VALENTINE," wrote Mlle. de Ganges—"You will be vexed with me for having left without seeing you, and heaven only knows what you must think of me. You will understand later on that it was necessary for me to act as I did. I do not ask you to approve of my conduct. Our feelings are not the same, and my position has nothing in common with yours. I owe no account of my actions to anyone, except perhaps to you, and to-day I am not disposed to fill four pages in justifying myself. Be content then to learn that I have decided to hoist the flag of independence. I have gone with all due forethought into the camp of the irregular division, and I think that I shall have no difficulty in holding my own there. But it is not to declare my principles to you that I am writing. Events occurred last night in your house, in which by chance I was mixed up, and which might serve your husband as a pretext to bring a serious accusation against you; but I have the complete proof of your innocence, and in addition I know your husband thoroughly. He has no heart, he is only possessed by lust and pride of birth. You love him, that is your misfortune. My duty is to tell you that I think him capable of anything, even of making away with you, and I beg you for pity's sake to let me know if he threatens your life. Then summon me. It is most easy to do so. Send a telegram to Mlle. Cézambre, to the office in the Place de la Madeleine, in two hours it will reach me; then I will hasten and save you."

"She also accuses Gontran," murmured Valentine greatly affected.

Valentine was indeed deeply grieved to learn that Diana thought so badly of Gontran de Sartilly, but she was compelled to allow that her late companion was right, and yet she did not even know the whole infamy of her husband who half an hour before their reconciliation had offered his heart and fortune to Diana.

Mlle. de Ganges had not thought it right to recount in her letter the odious scene that had taken place, but Valentine felt that she would not have accused Gontran without strong and convincing evidence; unless indeed the warning, accom-

panied by proffers of assistance concealed some snare. This hideous idea floated through the brain of the Countess, and yet she was not of a distrustful disposition by nature, but embittered by misfortune, she began to suspect everybody. She did not quite understand the declaration of independence made by Mlle. de Ganges, a declaration bounded by certain ill-defined limits; and the more that she reflected on this ambiguous letter, the more she felt persuaded that Diana was lost and that she must renounce ever seeing her again.

She had therefore now lost the friend from whom she had no secrets from her earliest childhood. The tears started to her eyes, and she was about to give way to her grief, when Lisa re-appeared without having been summoned.

"Madame, will pardon me," said she in a low tone, "but the Viscountess of Saint Senier is here. I told her that you were not well, but she persists in seeing you, and I think" added the maid lowering her voice still more, "that she has come about the affair of last night."

At first Valentine did not understand her, then she remembered that the young man who had intruded on her, had got into the garden by scaling the fence on the side of the Rue Villejust, and the idea struck her that perhaps he came from Saint Senier's house.

Mme. de Sartilly often met the Viscountess in society, but they did not care for each other, and were not on visiting terms. Had Valentine yielded to her first impressions she would have refused to receive her neighbour especially at such a moment, but then she imagined that this woman was perhaps going to give her some inkling of the commencement of this strange drama, and so she consented to see her; promising herself that she would act with the greatest reserve during this interview on so delicate a subject. Mme. de Saint Senier must have been very handsome at twenty-five, but she was now thirty-six, and nothing remained to her of her pristine beauty but a majestic figure, and perfectly regular features. She had grown stout and her complexion had become too ruddy. By gaslight she might still please very young men, and they certainly pleased her, for her heart was as young as ever. She was of very good birth, and her manners had all that freedom which used to be the distinguishing mark of the ladies of the court of Louis XV. She entered the room without the slightest embarrassment, held out her hand to Mme. de Sartilly who did not dare to refuse it, and sat down in front of her with wonderful self-possession.

"You will excuse me, dear Madame, I am sure," said she, as soon as Lisa had left the room, "if I almost forced my way

in, but you can render me a great service. We are not intimately acquainted, but I thought that you would do so, for you must be, I am sure, as kind as you are beautiful."

This comment cloaked as it was with a compliment did not cause Valentine to unbind her brows, and she asked coldly, "In what way can I be of service to you, Madame?"

"Oh, you know well enough. You were not asleep at three o'clock in the morning, for you had only just come home from a dance, when some one was fired at in your garden."

"I did hear some shots," replied Mme. de Sartilly, seeking to restrain the emotion that was gaining the upper hand in despite of all her efforts to remain calm.

"And you took no further notice?"

"I thought that some burglar had been fired at."

"But you did not see him then?"

"No," answered Valentine with a violent effort.

"Your husband saw him however, for he was pursuing him."

"That is true."

"You know then if he caught him?"

"No, the man escaped."

"What became of him?"

"I do not know. May I ask why you put all these questions?"

"I might invent some story to satisfy you, but I prefer being frank. That man was no robber. He had been surprised in my house. Compelled to fly at once, he took refuge in the garden of your house—and I am sure that he never left it."

The cool effrontery of this avowal made Mme. de Sartilly colour up to the roots of her hair, as she answered in tones of indignation, "And do you dare ask me what has become of him?"

"Would you rather that I went and asked the Count?"

"I should not prevent your doing so."

"Take care, it is your interest to prevent this story from spreading. Your reputation might be jeopardised. Mine has nothing to fear, besides I am not afraid of my husband or of anyone else in the world. To prove this to you, I will tell you everything. This young man who arrived in Paris some eight days ago is a creole from the Island of Mauritius where I was born, and he was recommended to me by one of my relations there. I received him yesterday for the first time. I kept him to dinner and he stayed rather late with me, for I do just as I like, and have no fear of compromising myself. He had just left me when he was attacked in the street; at the sound of the pistol shots, I

rang up my servants, they saw him run into your garden, and disappear behind the left wing of your house. I ordered them to keep silence in the matter, and this morning I called at the address that my young compatriot had given me, but he had not been home ; so that you see he cannot have left this house."

The Viscountess Saint Senier was evidently hiding a portion of the truth. That the creole had passed the night at her house was not for a moment doubtful, but she lied in saying that she had sent out her servants to help him. Valentine had seen the man who had fired the shots hidden in the shade of the Viscount de Saint Senier's house.

"Where did he remain then" asked she, "not in my room, I suppose?"

"You do not live alone here, there is your companion."

This time Mme. de Saint Senier had hit the bull's-eye, and a ray of light burst upon Valentine. Thoroughly upset by the events of the night, she had made no effort to join all the threads together, and had never thought that the young man who had leapt from her window might have sought shelter with Diana. But now all was explained. The blood that she had seen upon the bed must have been that which flowed from the wounded man, and Diana must have fled with him.

"I shall go and ask that young lady for news of George," continued the audacious Viscountess. "I forgot to tell you that his name was George——"

"Mlle. de Gauges has left the house," interrupted Mme. de Sartilly, who had no desire to learn the name of her neighbour's handsome friend.

"When?"

"This morning, Madame."

"But she will come back?"

"I think not."

"Very good. I understand it now, the jade has carried him off; but I must tell you that your husband should know this, since he was chasing George and——"

"Have the goodness not to occupy yourself with my husband," said Valentine exasperated by the violent speech of her visitor. "I do not trouble myself about yours."

"M. de Saint Senier, he certainly is not worth the trouble, why I hardly know whether he exists or not," answered the Countess shrugging her shoulders.

"It seems to me, however that last night——"

"You suppose that he surprised me with George, ah, poor fellow, he is incapable of committing such an act of discourtesy. I beg you to understand that he never enters

my apartments without my leave. He spent nearly all night at the club according to his usual custom."

"That he did not know then?"

"His valet probably told him this morning that there were some pistol shots fired in the Rue Villejust; but I do not suppose that he took much interest in the story, for he has not thought it worth his while to mention it to me. Besides I have not seen him to-day, for he is taken up with a great project with which no doubt you are acquainted, he is going into partnership with M. de Sartilly to run——"

Valentine knew it only too well, for had not this project been the cause of her rupture both with her father and Gontran, but she took care not to divulge her sorrows to her unworthy neighbour.

Then this woman, who almost made a boast of her infamy, got up, and said with an easy air, "Then my dear Madame, nothing remains but for me to take leave of you. I now know all that I wished to know, and all that I have to do, is to rescue this poor young man from the seductions of a hussy who is only seeking to make something out of him, for he is very wealthy. I suppose she did not leave you her address when she went off, but I will make it my business to find it out."

She offered her hand to Madame de Sartilly, who however declined to take it, so disgusted was she at her cynical disclosures, and her visitor left the room without her taking a step to escort her to the door.

Left alone Valentine threw herself into a chair, and began to reflect upon the proceedings of Madame de Saint Senier. This aristocratic lady must have indeed been lost to all sense of modesty to come to her in search of her lover, but though her speech had at times been a little incoherent there were some doubtful passages in it. Thus she lied when she said that she had voluntarily sent away the lover who had remained with her until three o'clock in the morning. She had no doubt been surprised with her lover, but if it was not by M. Saint Senier, who could it have been by? Valentine asked herself this question over and over again, but was unable to arrive at the truth.

CHAPTER X

A CAPITALIST IN LIVERY

THE Count de Sartilly had reached home before his wife did, but he had only remained there for the time necessary to change his dress, and he had given Lisa notice to leave because he happened to meet her on the staircase as he was going to his dressing-room, and because he wished to lose no time in inaugurating the line of authority which he intended to adopt, not only with the Countess but also with his servants. He did not wish to see his wife again that day, and he was anxious to meet his neighbour the Viscount de Saint Senier, for he had by no means given up the idea of entering into the famous partnership with him, although his father-in-law had refused to advance the necessary funds. M. de Sartilly was not in possession of the three hundred thousand francs at the moment, but he had made up his mind to procure them at any cost.

M. de Saint Senier was not at home, and Gontran did not care to meet the Countess, who for her part would have received him with great pleasure for she admired him much, and would willingly have entered upon a fresh intrigue. Gontran might certainly have asked her whether her husband had fired the pistol shots, but then he cared very little for information on this point.

Both Saint Senier and he, were members of the same club, and the former passed a great portion of his time there, partly to forget the conduct of his wife, but chiefly to bet and gamble, for this gentleman had thrown himself energetically into all the varied phases of sporting life. He hardly ever spoke of anything else, and he had certainly heard that he never thought on any other subject. The Count de Sartilly therefore knew where to meet him, but in the middle of the day clubs are nearly deserted, and so to fill up his spare time he lounged into Tattersall's, where he found plenty of congenial society, horse-dealers, trainers, and frequenters of the racecourse. He learned that in the racing world the rumour had already spread that he was going to run horses of his own in the coming season. Saint Senier was repeating it everywhere, and he had himself

announced that he had signed the deed of partnership, which was pretty near the truth as the document had to be completed the next day.

Gontran could not draw back from this arrangement without breaking his word, or what was worse in his eyes, of appearing to be in embarrassed circumstances. He did not therefore contradict the persons who seemed to be well informed on the subject, and even permitted himself to be congratulated on his future probable successes, and listened to advice regarding the purchase of horses for his new stables. He never let his thoughts dwell for a moment upon Valentine who was weeping in solitude, or if he did think of her for a moment, it was to consider how he could make use of her weakness, and to swear that he would be inflexible towards her. After a long visit, he walked down the *Champs Elysées*, and entered the club at four o'clock. It was not perhaps as aristocratic a one as many others in Paris, but it was full of life, and the play was very high, and for this reason *Sartilly* and *Saint Senier* who were members both of the Union and the Jockey club, preferred it to these where the society was better, and the stakes less ruinous. Gontran passed through several rooms filled with quiet whist parties, and made his way to the billiard room, where he hoped to find *Saint Senier* who was a very skilful player, though he much preferred a game at *baccarat*. There was a crowd round the table where two players of almost equal skill were contending. One of the players was a retired colonel well known to all the frequenters of the club for his detestable temper, the other was *Saint Senier* who was making a splendid break, and canonning at every stroke amidst the suppressed applause of the spectators, and much to the disgust of his adversary.

M. de Saint Senier was ten years older than his friend Gontran, and in appearance he did not resemble him at all, for he was tall, fat, and clumsily built, with hair turning grey, and he had all the air of an English farmer, a gentleman farmer, as they say on the other side of the channel. He also imitated their manners, and to complete the resemblance had all his clothes made in London. There was however about him that unmistakable air which is the result of mixing in aristocratic society, and above all he possessed an immense stock of coolness and self-command which is generally found in possessors of large fortunes. He had plenty of toadies in the club, rich people always have, but these even laughed openly at his conjugal mishaps, which were well known, and some even accused him of shutting his eyes to them, from mercenary motives, as his wife had even a larger fortune than he had. One of his worse points was his avarice, he

was suspected of putting his money to very bad uses, and he was a pitiless creditor. He never granted the slightest time for payment, and the unfortunate player who did not settle his card debts within forty-eight hours was certain to find his name posted up in the club-room, at the request of this terrible Viscount. But why people hated him most was because of his luck, for he seemed never to lose. To-day he was in the full swing of it, the most risky strokes always scored, whilst the colonel missed the easiest shots. Sartilly did not think it advisable to interrupt his exploits, and so waited until the end of the game, which was concluded by Saint Senier making a cannon off all four cushions. The unlucky colonel asked for his revenge, but the Viscount who had recognised Sartilly excused himself, and gaily pocketing the ten louis for which they had been playing, left the old warrior to grumble at his ease. Taking Gontran's arm, he led him into a corner of the room, and said to him bluntly :

"My dear fellow, I am delighted to see you to-day, for we sign the agreement to-morrow. The deed is ready, and my notary will wait for us at two o'clock. You have got the money, I presume?"

"Not yet," answered Sartilly.

"The deuce! why I have announced publicly that you would pay it to-morrow to our joint accounts in the Credit Lyonnais, my own money is already there, and before we conclude yours must be paid in; however, you still have the time to get it."

"The time certainly, but no possibility of doing so."

"How is that? Why, yesterday you told me that you were sure of getting it to-day."

"I hoped to have been able to have done so."

"And you have not been able. Allow me to observe, that I had relied on your promise, and that you have placed me in a most embarrassing position. I have already purchased three brood mares, as you know, I have given orders for the buildings down there, I have rented grazing land, and I have engaged an engineer for the artesian wells. If therefore it suits you to break off from our arrangements, I trust that you will not leave all these preliminary expenses on my shoulders."

"Certainly not, nor do I give up the project. Only—I am not ready."

"In other words you cannot lay your hands on three hundred thousand francs, and that is a thing that I can hardly believe, for my dear fellow your wife brought you something like six millions."

"Not a sou of which I can touch. When I married, it was all settled on herself."

"A grave fault on your part, an inexcusable error, for Mlle. Vacheron would have accepted any conditions that you might have imposed on her."

"She might perhaps, but it was a different matter with her father, I did my best, but he turned a deaf ear to all my propositions."

"And as you were precious hard up, you married her all the same. Don't think for a moment that I blame you for that. It has always been the same with the nobility. Before the revolution, when a ruined gentleman married the daughter of a wealthy citizen, people said he had *manured his lands*. But hang it when one marries beneath one, something ought to be made out of it, and after all you live at the rate of a hundred thousand crowns a year, and I can't see how you can be pressed for money; besides in your position it is the deuce and all if you can't find three hundred thousand francs."

"I had expected to find them, otherwise I should not have entered into arrangements with you."

"Find them! And where pray?"

"In my father-in-law's strong box, but he has refused to advance them to me."

"If your wife had asked for them, he would have given them to her."

"She did ask, but she got nothing out of the old skinflint."

"That is serious. However, perhaps there is another way, let us look for it. Between ourselves, they say that your wife adores you, that is more than mine does me. If she would guarantee the debt, there are plenty of persons in Paris who would lend you the three hundred thousand francs."

"She might consent perhaps, but the law steps in, my wife's signature according to the deed of settlement, is valueless."

"In a court certainly, but do you think that M. Vacheron would permit his daughter's signature to be dishonoured?"

"I don't know I am sure."

"But I am sure that he would not. You don't know self-made men. These purse-proud upstarts place great value on the respectability of their name, as we do now, and much more than we did formerly. M. Vacheron would not give you a thousand francs to satisfy one of your whims, but he would spend his entire fortune to prevent his daughter making her appearance before a law court."

"If I could only believe that."

"At any rate you might try."

"I certainly would if I knew a capitalist who was disposed to make the advance under such conditions."

"If I were not the Viscount de Saint Senier, I would do it myself, but as you must understand I cannot carry on such business. Your worthy father-in-law would take me for a money-lender. Others however, have not the same scruples."

"Introduce me to one."

"Why not?" replied the Viscount, after having gone through the form of appearing to reflect. "But have you thoroughly made up your mind. I ought to warn you that it will cost you a lot."

"I don't care what percentage I pay," returned Sartilly carelessly "

"The more so," said Saint Senier, "that we are bound to make money next racing season, and before the end of June you can pay him off. I am certain that with *Drawn Sword* we shall gain the Grand Prix de Paris, and I am only waiting for your payment to buy him, for he is one of the best *racing cracks* I know of. By backing him we ought to clear a million."

"And I will back him heavily you may be sure of that. But whilst I am about it I must have the money for four months."

"That will not be more difficult than borrowing the money for ninety days, for you can't go to a bank for the loan, and the capitalists who do this sort of business look less to the duration of the loan than to the solvency of the borrower."

"Ah, there you touch the weak spot. All the money-lenders in Paris know that I can only draw the dividends of the investments, and that large as they are, they will not permit me to pay at one blow three hundred thousand francs on a given date."

"You may call it three hundred and fifty thousand at once, for the lender would not do it for less."

"You know of one then?" asked Sartilly, quickly.

"Yes," replied his friend promptly. "You must understand that I have not had recourse to him myself, for I never put myself in the position of having to go to these gentlemen for assistance. But the man I have in view has at his disposal considerable sums of money, and I know that he likes to get a heavy return for them, and cares nothing about the usury laws."

"Can you introduce me to him?"

"Certainly, and without leaving the club, he is one of the waiters in the card-room."

"A waiter in the card-room! You are joking with me.

If it was a question of a thousand francs or so, it might be different, but——”

“My dear fellow, Augustus is not what a vain people suppose him to be, in other words petty gamesters do not know his worth.”

“The evening before last he refused to lend three thousand francs to the Baron de Sigolene.”

“Because the Baron is completely cleaned out. Augustus is always well posted, and he would not lend him a hundred francs, but to a man like you——”

“If he is so well posted up, he must know my exact position.”

“There ~~is~~ no doubt about that, dear boy ; but he generally consults me, and goes a great deal by my opinion ; only he would not advance you a hundred thousand crowns on your own signature.”

“Do you intend to offer him yours as a guarantee ?”

“No, and I will tell you the reason ; he will imagine that I am putting you forward to conceal my own impecuniosity, and will believe that I am borrowing through you, and would therefore have doubts as to the value of my signature, and would decline the honour of becoming your creditor.”

“Then I do not see what I am to do ; besides I can hardly believe that he has so much money at his command.”

“You seem to have forgotten that for twenty years he has been playing this little game, and that in the whole world there is not a better one. The player who borrows fifty louis during the evening returns it the next day with a bonus of one louis ; two per cent. per day is equivalent to seven hundred per cent. per annum.”

“But he must have losses ?”

“Hardly ever ; Augustus knows his clients too well, recruited as they are from the gambling world of Paris, and he has done so well that at the present moment he possesses, let me whisper it, three millions of francs. He has some thoughts of retiring after having made his fortune like an honest tradesman, and to obtain for himself a rest, a lucrative one, of course ; he is looking out for the managership of a club, or the superintendenceship of a casino in some place where people go to take the waters.”

“Ah, is it so ? then all that remains is to know what security he will require.”

“Why, that of your wife, of course.”

“It is worth nothing, as I have already told you.”

“Pardon me ; Augustus will not ask you to make Mme. de Sartilly accept a bill drawn by you. She could not meet

it, for she has by her settlement no power to deal with her capital."

"Well, what is to be done then?"

"Nothing however prevents her from drawing on her father a bill that will become due, let me say, on the 15th of June. You will endorse it, and I will lay my life that M. Vacheron will honour it."

"I have my doubts; besides when they present it to him for acceptance he will refuse to do so."

"That is very likely, and therefore he will not be asked to do so until the day on which it falls due; then when he sees his daughter threatened with immediate law proceedings, he will recoil before the scandal which a case in court about a bill always produces, and he will pay up, whilst you and she will get off with the scolding that he will inflict upon you, for which I do not think you will care much."

"You are certain that this Augustus will be contented with the signatures of my wife and myself?"

"Certainly, for I will advise him to ask you for nothing more, therefore, my dear de Sartilly, it depends upon you whether you will put me in a cruelly embarrassing position, and leave on my shoulders the whole expense of an affair in which I should not have embarked, had I not fully counted upon your co-operation."

"If it only depended on me——"

"And on whom does it depend?—on your wife, why she will do as you wish."

"You deceive yourself."

"What, after having agreed, all for the sake of pleasing you, to go and ask for the money from M. Vacheron?"

"He received her very badly; besides this morning I was on good terms with her, whereas now——"

"Good, I can guess; you treated her harshly, and reproached her severely for not having succeeded; and now she is in a temper with you. That will pass off, if you take the proper line, and with reference to that will you permit me to give you a piece of advice?"

"Well, let us hear it," said Gontran sulkily.

"Well, then, my dear fellow, with women as also with children and horses, you must always retain a certain amount of firmness, and never give way to any impulse of passion. Do not be too affectionate, they will take advantage of it; nor too harsh, for they will kick against it; they will lash out, and end by gaining the upper hand. The way to act is to establish your ascendancy from the first, and once and for all to assume the mastery. Let them occasionally have their heads, when it suits you to do so. In

this manner it will not take three months to break in the most restive young wife."

"You applied this system of training, I suppose, to Mme. de Saint Senier?" asked Gontran ironically.

"Oh, my own case is quite different. I merely made a business affair of my marriage. I was nearly as well off as my wife. I did not care much for her, and she did not care a rap for me, and so we at once entered into an arrangement to live as we have lived for the last fifteen years, each going our own way. She does not interfere with my liberty, and I give her hers freely. I spend as much money as I want, and she receives whom she likes. So that there is never a shadow of a difference between us; that of course is the best way."

"But sometimes it must prove inconvenient for you?" said Gontran, with a sneer.

"You mean, that my wife deceives me, well, I know nothing of it, and do not wish to. It is quite enough for me that she does not openly compromise herself, and I am perfectly satisfied. She comes of a good family; her ancestor the Marquis de Salazie was Governor-general of the Isle of France under Louis XVI., so that if she does occasionally kick over the traces, it is only natural and does not hurt her."

"Idiot," thought Gontran, who remembered the incident of the previous evening.

"Therefore," continued the cynical Viscount, "I have no need to trouble myself about her conduct; indeed I think much more about our stables. Why, just fancy, this morning while I was at breakfast, my valet permitted himself to report some strange scenes which had taken place at extraordinary hours in my house, but I soon shut him up in a manner that will prevent him opening his mouth on such topics any more. But let us return to the former matter. You are in a better position with your wife than I am with mine. Your estrangement will not last long, and it will be easy for you to put an end to it. It is one of those occasions in which you must give her her head a little, as I said before, and there must be no delay. Do as I tell you, your share must be paid down to-morrow morning. There is our man, he is looking for one of his debtors, I can see it in his face. Shall I call him?"

Gontran hesitated for a moment, he asked no better than to borrow the money he required even from a waiter, only he had but faint hopes of persuading Valentine to employ the means that Saint Senier proposed to get the money from her father.

"If the man is not disposed to find me the money," said he, after a moment's silence, "it is useless for me to have anything to say to him. Will you, therefore, who know him, have the goodness to sound him first?"

"Certainly," answered the Viscount, and made a sign to the liveried capitalist to wait for him at the other side of the room. Augustus was a strapping fellow of the true foot-man cut. He had large red whiskers, and a sly expression which did not betoken a good disposition. Gontran saw him come up cringingly to Saint Senier, who seemed to drop all his dignity and to be whispering with him as if he was his equal.

"This is strange," thought Sartilly. "Saint Senier is behaving just as if Augustus was his partner." The thought only flashed across Gontran's imagination for an instant, and indeed it appeared most unlikely that the rich and noble Viscount Saint Senier should be in league with a card-room waiter to rob unlucky gamblers.

The conversation lasted but a few minutes, and then the Viscount with a smile on his face came up to his friend followed by Augustus, and said, "It is done."

"Then," asked Sartilly, fixing his eyes steadily on the man, "you are prepared to advance me this sum of money?"

"Upon the conditions which your lordship already knows," answered Augustus. "A bill for three hundred and fifty thousand francs due the 15th of June, drawn on M. Peter Vacheron, signed by the Countess of Sartilly, formerly Mlle. Vacheron, and endorsed by your lordship, a bill which shall not be negotiated but which shall remain in my hands until it falls due."

What struck Gontran the most was not the heavy percentage for which he was prepared, but the knowledge which the man appeared to have of his family affairs, the words "formerly Mlle. Vacheron," was like the stroke of a whip across the face, to the fine gentleman who however did not hesitate to extort money from his father-in-law by so mean an action. This little feeling of humiliation however did not prevent his asking the question that was most important to him. "When can I have the money if I accept these terms?"

"To-morrow before twelve o'clock, and if your lordship will permit me to call at your house, I will hand over to you in exchange for the bill, a cheque for three hundred thousand francs on the Bank of France."

"I had rather conclude the affair this evening," returned Gontran, who could not bear the idea of this usurer in liverly, crossing the threshold of his house.

"I am entirely at your lordship's orders. I shall not leave the club until to-morrow morning."

"Very well. I shall be back in an hour, I am going to dine."

"All that your lordship has to do will be to send for me," said Augustus, bowing and retiring backwards.

"Then you accept?" asked Saint Senior, as soon as the fellow was out of hearing.

"Yes," growled Gontran, with a shrug of his shoulders, "so as to get you out of a fix."

"Thanks, and I can assure you that you will never regret having acted as you have done. The remedy is a heroic one, but it will be efficacious. You will gain ten times the sum that you have borrowed from this fellow."

"I hope it may be so, but I am not yet certain whether I can persuade my wife, and I have no time to lose in making the attempt, and the first question is, shall I find her at home?"

In his own heart he knew that he should. Where would she have gone after the scene in the Bois de Boulogne. There was no question of dining together at a restaurant, as had been arranged before her visit to the ex-contractor, and Valentine must have returned home to weep.

Gontran was not at all sure of getting her signature. Her disposition was too noble to permit her to lend herself to a fraudulent manoeuvre, and he felt that any part that he might play would have no effect upon her now, and besides, he did not feel inclined to re-commence again. Valentine would not be taken in a second time, and he would certainly fail in his efforts, like an actor who has rehearsed too much. There was therefore nothing for him to do but to employ threats, and he determined to do so, though he felt some slight repugnance to such a course. But what risk did he run? Was not his wife entirely at his mercy, since she had actually signed a permission for him to kill her? His wife had never in his eyes held any important position in his life, and he had merely thought of her as an obstacle, since he had made up his mind to possess the haughty Diana, who, he flattered himself, would yet yield to a golden attack. Why then should he care how he behaved to Vacheron's daughter? The old man must pay, even if Valentine's signature was a forged one, indeed, that would be a stronger reason for his doing so, for he could not leave his son-in-law in a position which would ensure a degrading condemnation.

"If you have any doubts as to your success, my dear fellow," said Saint Senior, who was observing him, "we had better call back Augustus, and tell him that the affair is off,

You will then be spared the annoyance of having to inform him that you have been *black-balled* by your wife."

"You need have no fear of that," returned Gontran, wounded to the quick. "I shall bring back the signature before seven o'clock."

"Bravo, I will keep two places at the table for us, and until you return, I shall try my chance at baccarat."

"I am off then. Good luck."

"It is I who should wish it to you. The game that you are going to play is a more important one than mine. Remember my method of breaking them in, a tight hand on the rein, that is the way to do it, nothing like it, I assure you."

"It does not appear that you often make use of this famous method of yours," sneered Gontran, "for you say you let your wife go her own way."

"Now I do, certainly, but I commenced by establishing my authority, but only exercised it when circumstances required, and I find it works excellently, for I am as free as air, and so is my wife; everything is for the best in this best of worlds, and we agree perfectly. Here is the last instance of it. One of the handsomest young fellows that you ever saw came to me from Mauritius with a letter of recommendation, he is very rich, and I will introduce him to the club one of these days. He will be a nice pigeon for the lucky ones to pluck at baccarat. Well, I introduced him to Jeanne, my wife, and they have been having music and singing together, and—well, you know music polishes the manners and softens the heart."

The decided cynicism of his friend ended by disgusting Gontran. He was not at any time much troubled by scruples, he did not mind reducing his wife to beggary, but he would have been furious had she taken a lover, and the manner in which Saint Senier talked of his wife's infidelities, caused him to experience a feeling of repulsion for him. Not enough however, to prevent his going into partnership with him. He therefore cut short the conversation, and went off to procure the signature, failing which the loan would fall through, and firmly determined to bring it back at any cost.

CHAPTER XI

THE SIGNATURE TO THE BILL

M. DE SAINT SENIER let him go. That worthy gentleman did not doubt for a moment but that Gontran would procure the signature by hook or by crook, and that their partnership would be concluded the next day. On all sides he stood to win, and he cared little for anything else. But as he never liked to lose his time, he started off in search of a table where high play was going on. There was always one between five and seven o'clock, and the steady-going gamblers met at it by mutual consent. The one where play began at midnight and ended with daylight, attracted the younger and faster element, and at the conclusion there was always an exchange of promissory notes of more or less doubtful value. Saint Senier played at both, but he found it a better and a surer game to risk his money before dinner. The room devoted to the mysteries of baccarat was quite close to the billiard room, and he repaired thither, but he found that play had not yet commenced, although a numerous party had assembled. All were most desirous to commence, but they were pulling themselves together before getting to serious work. Meanwhile they talked, some discussed the grave question of standing on a five, whilst others chatted about the new pieces at the theatres and the most fashionable women.

"Does any one know Mme. de Sartilly's companion?" asked a young masher, raising his voice above the general hum of conversation.

"What, the auburn-haired woman with the emerald eyes!" exclaimed a lieutenant of dragoons, who was much oftener to be found at the club than at his quarters at the military school. "She is the handsomest girl in Paris."

"Unhappily, however, there is nothing to be done in that quarter, for her virtue is impregnable," observed a third.

"Not now. I have just met her in the Bois, in one of the roads where hardly anyone goes, by the Auteuil Lake."

"Alone?"

"Not a bit of it. She was driving about in a cab with a lover, and a very nice lover too, though he looked very seedy, muffled up in a fur coat, and as pale as if he was in a

galloping consumption. He appeared like a convalescent out for his first drive, and she like a Sister of Charity."

"That is not her style at all; and was the sick man her lover?"

"I am certain of it, and I should like to know what M. de Sartilly thinks of it."

"It is a pity then that you did not ask him, for he was in the club five minutes ago," remarked Saint Senier, drily, for he was not pleased that there should be any scandalous gossip regarding his future partner. Then as no one answered, he continued: "He will be here again at seven, and will I am sure be only too willing to give any explanation to those who desire information concerning his wife's companion."

This remark was made in such a tone that even the most inquisitive did not care to press the matter.

Sartilly was well known not to be the most patient of men, and Saint Senier permitted none to tread on his corns with impunity. Of all the characteristics of a gentleman, courage was the only one that this complaisant husband retained. "In the meantime," resumed he, "I will make a bank of a thousand louis, if none of you will bid higher. Come gentlemen, put it up to auction. What, no bidders, then it is mine." Then turning to the old soldier whom he had defeated at billiards, he added:

"Now, Colonel, you have a chance of taking your revenge."

"Thank you," returned the retired officer, "you are too lucky. I shall wait to play against you until you are a widower."

"What do you mean, sir?" asked the Count, drawing himself up. "Am I to look upon this as an impertinent allusion. The common saying is, 'Lucky at cards unlucky in love——'"

"Well, and you are unlucky in matrimonial love, as you know very well."

"I may be so, but I will not suffer anyone to call me so. My seconds shall wait upon you to-morrow morning."

"I shall expect them," growled the colonel, who had not anticipated being pulled up so sharply.

The laughs were not on his side. There was a dead silence in the room, as there usually is on such an occasion. The majority of those present considered that the colonel was in the wrong, and made a note to themselves that it was not advisable to irritate a husband who evidently was not so complaisant as they had thought, and so no one cared to bring the subject of Mlle. de Ganges' sentimental promenade up again. During this short altercation the Count had behaved himself in a totally different manner, and it was with perfect calmness that he took his place in the centre of

the table, and prepared to hold the bank against all comers. The players only waited for this signal to begin, and the colonel left the room muttering curses. All heavy players believe in some kind of *fetish*. Some put faith in a ring, others in the pendants of a watch chain, some will only stake with their hats on, or when chewing a tooth-pick. Others again insist on wearing spectacles, although they possess excellent sight, whilst some before venturing to enter their club, will walk for hours in the streets hoping to meet a hunch-back person, and gently touch the hump. M. de Saint Senier put no faith in all these superstitious, even that which ascribes to deceived husbands the privilege of always gaining. He only believed in turning up the cards that were dealt by chance, and the science of taking one at the right time; and his philosophical view of the game generally succeeded marvellously. This evening however he commenced by dropping a few hundred louis, and his bank was at its last gasp, when all at once the luck changed, and began to show itself in a formidable manner. He won in a truly extraordinary way: when his opponents stood on eight, he turned up nine; if he had only an ace, he still gained, and he was always fortunate enough to get a four if he took a card on a five; and he received all these strokes of good fortune with an air of indifference which exasperated his opponents. This was not the first time that he had plundered them in a similar manner, and more than one would, had he dared, have hurled at his head the same apostrophe that the short-tempered colonel had already made use of.

Things were even worse when after the deal was over he rose from his seat, went through his counters that were heaped up in front of him, and going to the cashier of the club, converted them into bank-notes. If he had openly robbed them, his departure could not have evoked a more bitter storm of maledictions. But M. de Saint Senier occupied himself as little with the anger of his victims, as he did with the pranks of his wife. It was a matter of the most perfect indifference to him whether anyone bore him a grudge or not, so long as he made a good thing of it, and he certainly had made one this evening. Something like thirty thousand francs in less than an hour, which was sufficient to console himself for the curses heaped upon him by people for whom he did not care a bit.

All that remained for him now was to conclude Sartilly's affair, and he went into the reading-room to pass away the time by glancing at the papers until his future partner should make his appearance. Generally he hardly looked at them, for he took no interest in politics, although he felt

obliged to profess those of his own class. The events of the day had no charms for him, and he knew nothing of literature. But by mere chance in one of the Boulevard papers he came across the following :

"There was a great disturbance last night in the District of the Etoile. A continued series of pistol shots, almost making us think that we were in a shooting-gallery. Was it all 'Much Ado about Nothing,' as Shakespeare has it? Or was it the noisy conclusion of some domestic drama? Now or never is the time for us to say, '*Find the woman.*'"

At any other time M. de Saint Senier would have paid no attention to this enigma, which had perhaps been invented by some journalist short of copy, but he remembered that that very morning he had had to impose silence on his valet, when he tried to tell him of something similar, and he asked himself if this had taken place in the neighbourhood of his house.

His wife's name was not mixed up in it, indeed, it was not even hinted at, and he did not believe that she had anything to do with the shooting. But Sartilly's house was only separated from his by a narrow street, and he could not help fancying that something startling had taken place at his neighbour's house. The remarks that he had just heard on the freak of the beautiful companion of the Countess de Sartilly seemed to confirm this suspicion, and he determined to try and clear up this mystery. Sartilly had told him that there was some unpleasantness in his household, and the nocturnal scene to which the papers alluded was perhaps the cause of it. "Bah," thought Saint Senier, "what have I to do with all this? Sartilly has engaged to bring me the bill with his wife's signature, and he will do so. It signifies very little to me how he contrives to get it."

About half past six Gontran came in. He was very pale, and seemed so tired that Saint Senier jestingly asked him if he had walked both ways.

"No; I took a cab, but it jolted me awfully," answered Sartilly.

"You must expect that. Well, have you succeeded?"

"I have."

"Not without some difficulty, eh?"

"On the contrary. My wife offered no opposition."

"Then all is well, and we have nothing to do but to ring for Augustus and complete the matter."

"The bill must be stamped, for there are no bill stamps ready made for so large a sum."

"That is a mere matter of form to go through, and Augustus will look to it. We will see him in the little red drawing-room."

The Viscount led off Gontran, and told him on the way how Mme. de Sartilly's companion had been seen in the Bois de Boulogne alone with a handsome young man, to which Gontran replied:

"Ah, she has overstepped the boundary. I expected as much, and I am not sorry, for I was going to turn her off."

"Good," returned Saint Senier, "you treat matters in a proper way, and you are right to do so; but I read in one of the papers that they were firing off revolvers in our neighbourhood. Do you know anything of it?"

"Do you?" asked Gontran, impatiently.

"My servant tried to tell me something about it, but I would not listen to him. So this story does not affect you at all?"

"No more than it does you, I suppose."

"Oh! for my part I laugh at it. The paper hints that there is someone's wife at the bottom of it, and you know my principles. Talking of wives reminds me that I have quarrelled with Colonel Tarsac! Yes, my dear fellow, I have a duel on my hands, and I rely upon you to call upon him to-morrow on my behalf to arrange matters for the meeting. Take whom you like as the other second, Mussidan will do, and he will not refuse me, I am sure. Try to get the sword chosen as the weapon. I am a first-rate fencer, nor am I bad with the pistol, and I will give this impertinent fellow a good lesson."

"What, are you going to fight for Mme. Saint Senier?"

"Does that astonish you? She is utterly indifferent to me, and I do not put myself up as the champion of her virtue. But I will not allow anyone to jeer at me, and this ill-bred soldier has presumed to jest about my conjugal misdeeds in public, and I intend to chastise him. As a man of good family, you can understand this."

"Perfectly," answered Sartilly, who, like his partner, was capable of everything except trifling with what in society is called honour. The entrance of the card-room waiter put an end to this dialogue. He came in with a smile on his lips, but Gontran fancied that he could detect beneath it a certain amount of uneasiness. "M. de Sartilly has brought the bill duly signed," began Saint Senier. "Have you drawn out the cheque on the Bank of France?"

"Yes, my lord," answered Augustus, respectfully.

"Here is the bill," continued Sartilly, taking it from his pocket-book, and handing it to him. "Both the signatures are there, but there is no stamp."

Augustus took it and examined it attentively.

"Well," ask Saint Senier, "do you think that the signatures are forged?"

"Oh, my lord, how can you think of such a thing?" replied the man. "I have not the honour of being acquainted with that of the Countess, but I should not for a moment permit myself to doubt——"

"You need not doubt anything," interrupted Saint Senier. "Hand over the cheque in exchange for the bill. It would perhaps have been more according to rule if Mme. de Sartilly had signed in your presence, but you are sufficiently intelligent to understand that that was quite out of the question. The word of my friend ought to be enough for you, and I will be his security, morally of course. If I do not put my signature by the side of that of M. de Sartilly, it is because it would not be right for my name to appear in a private transaction between him, his wife, and his father-in-law."

Augustus bowed, and handed over the cheque. Evidently M. de Saint Senier's word was law to him. "I will undertake to get it stamped," said he as he left them.

"And now, my friend," observed Saint Senier, rubbing his hands, "we are going on like steam, and in three months you will see the results of our partnership. Confess that you have acted wisely in following my advice. You see you had but to say the word, and your wife did as you desired. I was sure of it; you had only to take her the right way. Come, they have announced dinner, and we will continue our conversation when we leave the table."

Gontran allowed himself to be led to the table by his excellent friend Saint Senier, who thought to himself, "Whether his wife has signed, or he has signed for her, Vacheron will certainly take up the bill when it falls due."

CHAPTER XII

AN UNLICENSED EDEN

PARIS will soon be nothing else than a heap of houses packed closely one against the other like herrings in a barrel. Little by little the gardens are disappearing before the mass of stone and brickwork. Flagstones are covering up lawns, as the rising tide hides the sands of the shore. In a few years from this, there will be no more trees, save those in the public spaces and promenades, and the parks which surround the mansions of the nobility will share the same

fate as the more humble gardens, for even gigantic fortunes cannot long resist the periodical divisions amongst inheritors.

However, there still exist in half-forgotten corners of Auteuil, cottages placed in the midst of umbrageous enclosures, but the most of them show the ravages of time, for they are seldom repaired, and are devoted to swift-coming destruction. The Parisians have a mania for designating the spots where they live by foreign names. A collection of cottages is called a *villa*. Rome has its Villa Borghèse, Auteuil has its Villa Montmorency, and Passy has its Prince's Park, where princes are hardly ever to be found, any more than they are in the rustic dwellings that are grouped about the entrance to the Rue Poussin and the boulevard which lines the inside of the fortifications. Most of these are let to honest married couples, who live as though they were in the country, but a few serve as retreats for lovers. Lovers are not too difficult to please; as long as they can have air, flowers, and solitude, they ask for nothing else. All these could be found in the Villa des Primevères, which is situated nearly in the centre of the Villa Montmorency, and which served as a refuge for a pair of lovers who came to a sad end. A Russian had bought it to live in with an English lady, the wife of a British peer, with whom he had run away. One morning they were both found dead. The man had blown out his brains after having stabbed his mistress to the heart. The result of this melancholy drama was that this ill-omened dwelling remained empty for five years, no one caring to become the tenants of a house in which so terrible a tragedy had taken place.

Diana de Ganges had little superstition in her nature, had no fears about residing in it.

She had remarked it a long time back in one of her rides about Auteuil, and when she left the home of the Sartilly's for ever she had come and established herself there, but she had not come alone. There she had lived for the past six weeks, and had not felt a shadow of regret in having deserted the tents of respectability. This nobly-born orphan was a strange girl, and she had not deserved her nickname of Fickle Heart, for she had had no lover before she met the wounded man that she had picked up and sheltered on that winter's night. The same feelings had inspired them both at the same instant, and they had yielded to these at once. Diana had almost said, "You are the realisation of my dreams," and George had answered, "I adore you," and a free and unauthorised union had followed this improvised betrothal.

The young man's wound was not a very severe one; it was

a mere flesh wound in the arm ; and Mlle. de Ganges had dressed it with her own fair hands. They had fled away together before the break of day, and before the setting of the sun they were installed together in the Villa des Primevères. The member of the club who had spoken of having met them the day after the pistol shots had been fired had encountered them on their way to take possession of their new abode. Since her hurried flight Diana had had leisure to enter into full explanations with George. She knew all his history now ; it was not a long one ; for he was only twenty years of age—three years younger than she was—and the incidents of his life, which were not numerous, for he had only just arrived in Paris when the ardent Viscountess had taken possession of him at his very first visit. From the first day of their life together Diana had laid down her conditions. She wished to live with her lover in perfect equality—that is to say, each paying their own expenses. George was a minor to whom his guardian in the Mauritius made an allowance of fifty thousand francs a year, and he would, on attaining his majority, enter into possession of an enormous fortune. Mlle. de Ganges would not take any portion of this, and insisted in contenting herself with six thousand livres per annum, which was the amount of her income. She had at her own expense taken the villa completely furnished, and paid her personal expenses out of her own pocket. But she never intended that later on George should not have rooms of his own, and also carriages and horses. She had also decided that she would make use of these when the fancy should seize her to appear in the world of Paris, and to show herself in all the splendour of her magnificent independence to those who had known her poor but haughty in the house of the Countess de Sartilly. But the hour for exhibiting this transformation had not yet struck. Diana had no desire to hasten its coming, and her lover waited for it without impatience. Their life flowed on like some limpid stream. One happy day followed another, and they never wearied of telling one another how great was their love.

They seldom went out except in the evening, and then they would wander hand in hand through the least frequented walks of the Bois de Boulogne, and as no one had yet discovered their retreat they never spoke to a living soul. George had brought with him from Mauritius his foster-brother, a negro of the purest race, who waited upon them both with unparalleled devotion, and, thanks to the attentions of honest Domingo, Diana was perfectly able to dispense with the services of a waiting-woman. Rose had remained behind at the Sartillys' and fearing to put the Count on her track,

Diana did not attempt to summon her former maid. She had given her address at the post office in the Place de la Madeleine, so that they might send her Valentine's telegram, if one should be dispatched, but none had yet arrived.

She had almost forgotten her dear Valentine, for love is a selfish passion, and her whole being was absorbed in it; but she sometimes reproached herself for this indifference on her part, and often vowed that she would write again, and give her new address. She was most anxious to know how things were going on between the Countess and her husband. Since she had left the house Diana had had no intelligence direct or indirect regarding this dangerous man, for no society gossip reached the Villa des Primevères, and the lovers did not waste their time in reading the papers. Nothing was wanting for their comfort. Diana had left behind her her dresses and linen, but in Paris money can procure everything in a very few days, and Diana was soon equipped as well as ever. As for George, he had nothing to do but to send Domingo to the Hotel Meurice, where he had put up, for his baggage. The pleasant little cottage was a more agreeable residence than many a more sumptuous apartment nearer the centre of the great city. In the first place, it was situated in the midst of a garden filled with flowers, which Domingo looked after with the greatest attention.

Negroes are, as a rule, born gardeners and cooks.

There were even some fine trees in the grounds. The house had not suffered from not having been occupied; indeed, there had been less wear and tear. The furniture was in good condition. The landlord had purchased it from the executors of the dead Russian, and had had it looked after with a view to a future tenant. The house was built of wood, and had two storeys above the ground floor, in which were the kitchen and offices.

On the second floor were two bedrooms and dressing-rooms, and on the first a dining-room and two sitting-rooms, one large and the other small, both of which opened on to a veranda, as they always do in every villa worthy of being so called. The smaller one had in it a piano, and couches of all shapes and colours, and there the Russian had lived in an Eastern fashion, smoking cigarettes of Turkish tobacco, whilst his mistress soothed him with music. It was in this room also that George and Diana passed their days, intoxicated with love and melody.

April had arrived; the air was full of the breath of the spring; and the birds fluttered hither and thither, building their nests in the highest branches of an acacia which stood before their open window.

Diana, half reclining on a couch, was amusing herself by passing her snow-white fingers through George's hair, who was reclining at her feet. They uttered no sound; why should they? The language of the eye is enough for enraptured lovers, and they shot ardent glances at one another, in which they had poured all the love and passion of their hearts.

George was a different being from what he had been at Mme. de Sartilly's on that memorable night, where he had braved death to save her from her husband's wrath. Since he had lived with Diana, the youth had become a man, like a plant shoots suddenly up when it is placed under glass, and warmed with the beams of the sun. His sun was the passion of love, which had blazed forth in his hitherto virgin heart—the passion of a first love. Mlle. de Ganges had also undergone a complete transformation. Her beauty had as it were become permanently fixed. The hot blood of youth tinted her cheeks, her eyes sparkled with a new light, they almost seemed to throw out flames. Gontran de Sartilly would assuredly have hardly recognised her, and had he seen her passing her fingers over George's handsome head as it rested on her knees, he would have become mad with rage and jealousy. At that time she never allowed her thoughts to turn to him for a moment. Diana was permitting herself the luxury of living without a thought of the past, or a care for the future.

"George," murmured she softly, "sing me the song of Fortunio." George lifted his great dark eyes to her face, and sang the first couplet of that delicious song, written by Alfred de Musset, and set to music by Offenbach:

"Do you believe me when I say
That I have dared to love thee."

His voice was wanting in power, but it was very sweet, and he threw so much expression into the words that Diana, filled with rapture, did not wait for the conclusion, but taking her lover's head between both her hands covered his face with kisses. "Hush," she said, "you will drive me wild, certainly I love you too fondly."

"Never too fondly," replied George in a low voice. "I adore you, and I do not think that that is enough."

"Truly? Are you speaking the truth? Tell me are you not yet wearied of the life that we have led since I carried you away?"

"All my hope is that it may last for ever."

"Swear to me that you regret nothing, that you do not yet

weary for anything, and that you do not for a moment long for the pleasures of Paris of which I am depriving you."

"I know nothing of them, nor do I desire to do so. Why then should I regret them?"

"How can I tell? There was the Viscountess, for instance."

"That foolish old woman. Why, you know that I risked my life to escape from her clutches."

"But I am too old for you, who are only twenty, for I am twenty-three."

George closed her mouth with a passionate kiss, and in a moment they forgot all the outer world. But even the most passionate transports must come to a close, and Diana resumed, with a smile, "I have never clearly understood your adventure with the Viscountess. I know that you escaped from her house at three o'clock in the morning, but nothing proves to me that you would not have remained had not her husband come in."

"It was not her husband; it was her servant."

"What! a servant?"

"Mme. de Saint Senier had kept me to listen to Mauritian airs. She was born there, you know."

"A fine excuse, indeed."

"I thought it was merely a pretext, so I made some excuse for leaving."

"And she threw herself into your arms?"

"Very nearly. I do not know how I disengaged myself, luckily the door was opened, and at the most critical moment I saw a tall fellow in livery come in."

"A sort of giant with enormous black whiskers?"

"Yes, how do you know that?"

"That was her coachman; I have seen him pass dozens of times driving his mistress to the Bois. What did he want with her at that hour?"

"I did not understand at first. He commenced by saying that M. de Saint Senier was coming in. Afterwards I thought that this was a falsehood, but I took advantage of the opportunity to rush out of the drawing-room. I only stopped to throw my greatcoat over my shoulders, for I had taken it off in the ante-chamber, and forgot all about my hat."

"Why all this haste, you had nothing to reproach yourself with?"

"I had lost my presence of mind, I believed that the Viscount was coming, and that he would surprise me with his wife. I cared nothing for her, but I had no wish to compromise her good name. I ran down the staircase as fast as I could and had almost reached the foot of it when I heard some

one running after me. I threw open a door, passed across a courtyard the gate of which was not closed, and at the moment I got into the street I heard a voice calling after me 'Stop or you are a dead man.' I had half a mind to turn round and face my adversary, who, I did not doubt for a moment was M. de Saint Senier, but he knew me as I had handed him my letter of introduction upon my arrival in Paris. It was therefore necessary to escape him at all risks. I climbed over a gate which was in front of me, saw an open window——"

"Valentine's window, I know what happened then, but the man what did he do?"

"He had lost sight of me for a moment, but he doubtless thought that I had taken refuge in M. de Sartilly's house, for he took up a position in front of the window, I could trace out his form in the shade."

"And in spite of that you leapt out to save my poor friend, and had there been no other reason I should have loved you for that. Then according to your idea you do not think that it was M. de Saint Senier who fired at you and wounded you in the arm?"

"No, I am sure that it was the servant. Whilst he was watching for me I went to the window, and without being seen, I could catch the gleam of his livery buttons; but then he may have fired on me by his master's orders."

"What a child you are. Do you think that the Viscount would risk penal servitude in order to get rid of one of his wife's lovers? Why, she has plenty of them, and he is not at all jealous."

"Who was it then that tried to kill me?"

"Have you not guessed that it was the coachman?"

"Yes, it was he who fired, but why did he do so?"

"Because he is Mme. de Saint Senier's lover, you simple George. Had you permitted yourself to fall in love with her, you would have found a rival in the person of this fellow. He thought that you were going to steal away his Viscountess from him, and he wanted to put a stop to it. I expect he gave it her soundly afterwards; I should not wonder if he had beaten her." And Diana laughed with all the gaiety of her heart.

"But this woman is more vicious than the most degraded of her sex," exclaimed George.

"She is a lady that moves in the best society, and mixes with duchesses. She used to look down upon me from the pinnacle of her grandeur when I lived with the Sartilly's, and no doubt she despises me profoundly now. But this is the way in which things go on in this Paris where you have

just arrived with all the illusions of your age from the island where Paul and Virginia lived and loved."

"As we do."

"Not exactly ; and I confess that I like our way the best," replied Mlle. de Ganges, gaily. "The only question is, will it last ? That is all that sometimes disturbs me."

"Why should it ever finish ?" asked George, winding his arm round the neck of his beautiful mistress. "Are we not both free ? There is nothing to prevent our being married."

"I should not care for it," answered Diana, quickly. "It would be the certain means to make us disagree. You do not understand me. Know me better, my George. I am a creature made up of whims, and I have never been willing to submit to any authority. Should anyone attempt to restrain me, I would break their bonds. I will obey no one but my lover. I will willingly be your slave, but my slavery must be voluntary ; and if I married you, it would cease to be so. My love for freedom is so strong that I loathe all conventionalities. Had you been properly introduced to me, I do not think that I should ever have been yours : the strangeness of the incident drove me to your arms."

George listened to her no longer, he clasped her to his breast, and his soul sped away to the land of dreams.

A voice calling to him from the garden brought him down to earth once more, and substituted reality for sentiment.

"Master," said Domingo, "I want to speak to you."

"Well, come up, then," cried George. The lovers rose up at the same moment, and came into the veranda that surrounded the villa. Domingo approached them showing his white teeth, and in his honest black face it was easy to read that he would have thrown himself into the fire for his foster brother.

"What is the matter ?" asked George.

"There is a white man that bothers me," answered Domingo.

"What do you mean ? How does he bother you ?"

"Well, master, you know when I went with you the day after we came to Paris to the house of that lady who comes from over there—from Mauritius ?"

"The Viscountess of Saint Senier," said George, with a frown.

"Yes, master, we went there in a carriage, and I remained in the street ; and that lady's coachman was there. Whilst you were inside he talked to me, asked me where I came from, and who you were, and I told him. Was I wrong ?"

"Was it to repeat this conversation to me, that you ventured to disturb me ?"

"No, master ; but when you send me to Paris, I go by the Avenue d'Eylau."

"And you have met this fellow?"

"Yes, master, he was smoking his pipe at the door of a public-house. He recognised me at once, called out to me, and asked me to have a glass of rum with him."

"I thought that I had forbidden you to talk to anyone at all."

"Oh, I did not talk much ; he did all the talking, I only did the drinking."

"And you got drunk, you foolish fellow?"

"No, master, Domingo can carry more liquor than all these whites ; and Domingo knew how to hold his tongue. He wanted to know where you lived, but he got nothing out of me ; only the next day——"

"Well, what happened then?" asked George sharply.

"The next day, master, he did not come up and speak to me when I passed on the way back, but he saw me through the window, and followed me some distance off."

"You should have turned round and thrashed him."

"I should like to have done so," answered Domingo, scratching his ear, "but he is bigger and stronger than I am, and I think that he would have beaten me ; and then I did not catch sight of him until I was in the Boulevard Montmorency."

"When you did so, you should have run off."

"That is just what I did. I found a passage between two houses, I jumped over a fence, and reached the villa. I think that he lost sight of me."

"You think, you idiot, but you are not sure, when did this happen?"

"Yesterday, master."

"And you said nothing about it?"

"I thought that it was of no importance, but since then I have reflected, and the man's behaviour seems suspicious, and I want to ask you what I am to do if this rogue comes hanging about here?"

George hardly knew what to say, but consulted Mlle. de Ganges by a glance, who coolly replied, "He is here now, I can see him."

"Where do you see him?" asked George, quickly.

"Down there, behind the hedge, he has doffed his livery, but I can easily recognise him."

The garden of the villa was only surrounded by a fence covered with ivy, and from the veranda the road outside it could easily be seen.

The Countess's coachman was standing in the middle of the

road. He had caught sight of the young man whom he had previously surprised in his mistress's room, and he was looking at him from a distance with an unpleasant pertinacity.

"I know him now," exclaimed George, "and I will just go and ask him what he means by spying on me like this."

Mlle. de Ganges held him back saying, "You know why he is doing it, therefore it is useless to question him; and as I suppose you do not want to come to blows with him, I advise you to let him go his own way. He will not stay there long now that he has seen all he wants to see. Look, he is even now going."

Diana was right. The coachman went off with long strides, and soon disappeared at the turn of the road. If the man had been charged by his mistress with the mission of finding out where George lived he had fully succeeded.

"Just as I told you, master," murmured Domingo. "If he followed me, it was to know where you lived, and now he has got his information."

"It is all your fault," returned George, roughly. "Now go away."

The negro left them very sadly, with his head bent down.

"Our dream is over," said Diana, as soon as they were alone.

"Why? Because that woman knows where we live, I do not suppose that she will come and take me away."

"She is capable of trying to; but I am not afraid of that. You know what she is now, and would send her back to her husband; it is not her visit that I dread."

"What *are* you afraid of then?"

"That coachman is mixed up with the servants of M. de Sartilly, especially with Francis, his valet; he will tell him all that he has seen, and Francis will repeat it to his master."

"Well, what then?"

"His master will come here. You heard what he said in my room, when you were stretched on my bed?"

"I have not forgotten the insolent proposals that he made to you. Do you think that he will renew them?"

"I am sure he will, and with greater vigour. Whilst I was his wife's companion he preserved some outward semblance of decency, but now that I have fallen, he will keep himself within no bounds."

"Let him come, I shall be here."

"And if you were not, I should know how to defend myself; but if he came you would demand satisfaction for his conduct?"

"Most certainly."

"But I do not wish you to fight with that man, for he would kill you."

"I would rather be killed, than give you up to him."

"There is no fear of that," answered Mlle. de Ganges with a smile, "but you must take my advice. This Don Juan that I hate and despise, will not get hold of me against my will. What we want to do is to stop his attacks once and for ever, and the only means of doing so is to face the danger."

"I do not understand you."

"You are going to do so. We have been hiding ourselves here, as if we were criminals, and have been nursing the hope that the world would take no heed of us, but we have now a proof to the contrary. Mme. de Saint Senier has hunted you up, and the Count de Sartilly will do the same for me tomorrow, without counting in a number of evil-minded fools, who will endeavour to discover our secret, and disturb our love. Do not let us wait for them to find us. Let us show ourselves boldly, and go forth with our heads high, and hand clasped in hand. Let us defy our enemies, and they will fall back, and then we shall have really gained the right to love each other openly."

"That is what I asked you to do just now."

"No, you asked me to marry you, and that is not at all the same thing. I have told you how I look upon marriage, and I shall not change my opinion."

"What do you want me to do then?"

"I want you to exhibit me publicly as your mistress. I want you to show yourself everywhere with me, at the theatre, in the Bois, at the races. I want all Paris to know that Diana de Ganges lives with George Cézambre."

"You burn your boats by doing so," murmured George.

"Yes, so that neither of us may ever go back. When our connection shall once have been made public, we shall be bound to one another, and it will protect us against men and women; from men like Gontran de Sartilly, and women like the Viscountess Saint Senier, and we shall be left in peace."

"Are you sure of that?"

"As sure as I am of loving, and being loved by you; and I tell you again that if we remain thus, every effort will be made to separate us; such an action is one of the chief pleasures of unprincipled men, and heartless flirts; but if we boldly brave the opinion of the world in displaying our love, they will shrink from attacking us."

"You have more to lose than I have."

"What matters that?" asked Diana proudly. "I like to

compromise myself, and for you I would make much greater sacrifices. Besides, we have no choice left us. The daylight has penetrated the dim retreat of our love. Let us therefore throw it open to all the world, and once more return to everyday life."

"To quit this villa where we were so happy," sighed George.

"Who speaks of leaving it? I should feel that as much as you. We will remain here all the spring, only we will not shut ourselves up any more, but will lead a new life. Domingo is an excellent servant, but he will not be sufficient, I will engage a maid, and a cook, and you shall see how well I can look after a house; but that is not all, at the end of the garden there is a coach-house and a stable. You shall have a cab, and a victoria, two harness and two saddle horses——"

"We have them already. I wished to give to you a surprise, and did not speak of it before lest you should refuse to make use of them. I have not even seen them yet. Domingo managed it all. He drives excellently, and can look after horses well."

"Brave Domingo! then we shall have no need of a coachman, and I distrust them much, and now, my George, since we are agreed, promise me that we shall go to the races next Sunday?"

"To the races!"

"True, you come from your island home, and do not know that in April all the world hurries to Longchamps. You shall see how delightful the first spring meeting is. Then what a splendid opportunity to make our first appearance. Everyone will be there—The Count de Sartilly—Mme. de Saint Senier—and her hideous husband."

"And Mme. de Sartilly, I suppose," said George in a half whisper.

A shade of sadness passed across Diana's face. "Yes, Valentine also," murmured she. "I shall be pleased to see her again; and yet she will not dare to speak to me, and heaven only knows what she will think of me, when she sees me drive up in a handsome carriage. But now, George, I forgot to tell you that there must be no change in our arrangements. I will ride your horses and drive in your carriages, but I shall continue to pay my own expenses, and I will prove to you that with six thousand francs a year, a woman can be dressed quite elegantly enough to be worthy even of a millionaire like you. The only misfortune is that Valentine may be deceived, and I should not like to lose her esteem. I shall write to her this evening, and I hope that

she will reply to me. She must have so much to say to me. Perhaps even she may come to see me, now that she will know my address."

"Should she do so, I will endeavour not to be here."

"That will be best ; your presence would embarrass her in more than one way ; though she must certainly have a good opinion of you, considering what you risked for her. But now that I think of it, if we are to go to the races next Sunday, you have to lose no time in getting your carriages here, and so you must go to Paris to-day."

"Without you ?"

"Yes, dearest, without me. You must accustom yourself to leave me for an hour or two. I do not wish my lover to be always tied to my apron strings, and this will be an excellent opportunity to essay a temporary separation. It is a fine day, the Auteuil station is close by, I will show you the way to it, for I want a walk, and until you have your own horses and equipages, you may as well use the train."

"As you like, only I warn you that I shall soon be back again."

"I shall be delighted ; I hope, however, that you are not jealous ?"

"No, but I love you so much."

"You say that too often. Prove it to me by not lingering in Paris. And now let us go ; I will run and put on my hat, it will not take five minutes. Be ready when I come down."

Since her residence in the villa, Diana had not lost the good habit of dressing herself the moment she got up, for her instinct had told her that if she wanted to please her lover, he must not see her all day in a dressing-gown and slippers.

Before five minutes had elapsed, she passed through the garden leaning on George's arm, who took no more heed than she did of the persons they might meet on their way to the station.

CHAPTER XIII

CARTE AND TIERCE

THE distance from the Villa Montmorency to the station is not great, but lovers, like schoolboys, always take the longest way round, and do not walk very quickly. Diana and George walked down the Rue Lafontaine, exchanging those words which are unintelligible to the indifferent, but which penetrate to the very souls of those who love passionately. They

cared nothing as to what time the train would come in, and for very little they would have adjourned the trip which was to separate them for a few hours, until the next day. Diana, however, insisted upon it, for she was determined to show herself at the races at Longchamps, and she had managed to bring George Cézambre to feel with her on this matter, and he was going off to make all necessary arrangements for the carriage and horses, which were on the following Sunday to convey them to the lawn in front of the Grand Stand. As they came upon the open space in front of the Gate of Auteuil, Mlle. M. Ganges recognised, and pointed out to George the embarrassing figure of the coachman, seated under the arbour of a public-house, with a mug of beer before him. The fellow made no effort to move, but he had evidently seen them, and watched them narrowly.

"What the deuce is he doing there?" asked George, drawing away Diana in the direction of the station, "I had imagined that he had gone back to Paris, to tell his mistress the result of his investigations."

"Then you think that it is she who has set him to find out our whereabouts!" asked Diana with a laugh. "If you will take the trouble to reason out the matter, you will agree that there is not a grain of common sense in your idea. I daresay the foolish old woman deplores your absence, and burns with the desire to see you again, but she would hardly send a man who is her lover to look after you. This fine-looking coachman has come to look after you on his own account. He is jealous of you, and is afraid that you will appear again at his lady's house, and cut him out; and I would not mind wagering that he is delighted to find that you are not living alone, as he will now feel more secure for the future, and I am charmed that he has seen me leaning on your arm."

"He must know now for certain that he need not fear me as a rival. But he will certainly tell Mme. M. Saint Senior that we are living together, if it was only for the sake of annoying her."

"That is far from unlikely, but I laugh at that. If she does not know it to-day, she will on Sunday, when she will see me in your carriage at Longchamps. On that day we shall for the first time unfurl our flag of defiance before the armies of the fools and prudes, and I am only too anxious to show a bold front to the enemy."

"And I, too," exclaimed George, boldly.

"We will go in a victoria, so that all the world may see us," continued Diana, "in a close carriage it would seem as if we were hiding ourselves. My toilet, I promise you, will

attract attention, for soldiers always wear full dress when they go into action. We have, however, no time to lose in preparing for the grand day. I shall summon my dress-maker, and I hope that by to-morrow the carriages will be in the coachhouse. Will Domingo be able to do all the work?"

"I shall engage a groom, and look after him myself."

"That will be all right," cried Diana; "and now go, for see, the train is coming in. Remember, I expect you this evening."

George kissed her hand, and sprang up the staircase that leads to the station, and Mlle. Ganges, having seen the train off, turned to depart. She did not intend to return to the villa, where she would be alone for the first time for six weeks. She felt that she needed a walk, and desired to breathe the soft breezes of the spring, and to inhale the sweet perfumes of the new leaves. The Bois was close at hand, and the fancy seized on her to walk in it for a couple of hours, to pass away a portion of the time during George's absence.

The coachman of the Countess was still in the same spot, and was so occupied in lighting his pipe, that he did not see her pass.

She hastily passed through the Auteuil gate, and plunged into the nearest shrubbery, delighted at not being followed by this unpleasant individual. The portion of the Bois in which she found herself, was one which is hardly ever frequented except upon days when there are hurdle races or steeple chases. The Steeple Chase Club has a course of its own here, in which are walls, ditches, and fences of every kind that may prove obstacles to the riders. The brook, into which many a jockey and his horse have fallen, flows from the Lake of Auteuil, so dear to the nursemaids of some years ago, and these jumping contests draw together nearly as many spectators as the great meetings of Longchamps; but on other days the place is almost entirely deserted. The carriages that move slowly round the lakes, and the elegant riders that frequent the Allée des Poteaux, seldom come as far as this.

Diana enjoyed this solitude. She walked deliberately into one of the pathways which ran round the lake, the banks of which had been transformed into carefully-kept lawns, whilst here and there benches were placed upon which the good citizens of the neighbourhood, and occasionally a stray pair of lovers were accustomed to take their rest. Upon this day the benches were all unoccupied, and Diana was about to pick out one to repose upon, when she

heard the sound of a carriage approaching along the road which leads from the fortifications. By the creaking of the wheels she knew at once that it was a hack-cab, and thinking that her solitude was about to be disturbed by a party of clerks and shop-girls, who had come to enjoy a breakfast in the open air, she determined to continue her walk. But instead of the riotous band that she had expected to meet, she saw a woman dressed in black appear at the other end of the lake ; she was thickly veiled, and was walking with hurried steps. She seemed to be seeking for some one, and her figure and appearance caused a vague feeling of recognition in the bosom of Mlle. de Ganges, as she drew on one side to permit her to pass.

Diana had not anticipated the meeting that was about to take place. When three paces only separated them the unknown stopped short, and after a moment's hesitation raised her veil, and said, "You, here !"

"Valentine !" exclaimed Mlle. de Ganges, and she seized Mme. de Sartilly's two hands, who after a brief resistance yielded to her, and pressed them warmly in return. "How happy I am to meet you," continued Diana. "I was about to write to you."

"Why have you not done so sooner, and I might then have replied to the calumnies which they are heaping on you ?"

"Calumnies, no, they are not calumnies ; I have a lover and I am living with him. You must have known that, for you surely received the letter that I sent you the day I quitted your house."

"I received it, but I hesitated to believe it. It is true then, and you fled with——"

"With the man who risked his life to save your reputation. I found him wounded, and bleeding, stretched on the snow-covered ground of your garden. I refused to yield him up to your husband's vengeance, when he came to my room and ordered me to do so. Now I love him, and do not desire to conceal my love."

"Can it be you, who are speaking to me—you, the companion of my childhood ?"

"Fickle Heart has changed her nature. Why should I not tell you so ? And can you reproach me for loving, when you love your husband ?" The cheek of the Countess grew pale, the blow had struck home. "Listen to me, Valentine, you may blame me, but you must allow that I have the virtue of openness. I could, like many others, have concealed the fact of my having a lover ; but I scorned to imitate the vile hypocrisies of the world of society. Let it condemn me !

I care little for its verdict, but I do care for your esteem, and I will prove to you that, if I have altered my mode of life, mercenary motives have nothing to do with the step that I have taken. I should have given myself to George had he been the poorest of the poor, and I will never accept the smallest portion of his fortune : Gontran de Sartilly when you selected him, was a ruined man——”

“But he married me,” interposed Valentine quickly.

“Yes, to your misfortune, but you loved him so passionately, that had you not been his wife, you would have become his mistress ; and do you dare to tell me now, that you do not regret having taken him for a husband, or rather for a master ?”

“Never, and yet I have suffered much.”

“Ah ! you confess it, this fine nobleman tortures you ?” then as the Countess was about to protest, she added, “Do not deny it, I know it for a fact.”

Mme. de Sartilly began to shed tears, and when Diana perceived it she said in gentler accents : “I do not wish to intensify your sorrow. I wish to protect you. Do not repulse my offer of assistance, however guilty I may seem in your eyes, and tell me all your troubles, I entreat you.”

“What good would that do ?” murmured Valentine.

“Will it not render them easier to bear ; confidence soothes the wounded spirit. Open your heart to me as you opened it in days gone by at our school, when we had no secrets one from the other. I have not changed from that time, since I come to you and confess my fault, if a fault it is.”

“No,” exclaimed Valentine, raising her head, “I must not be detained, I have not an instant to lose.”

“What do you mean ?— and tell me why have you come here alone in a cab.”

“Gontran has been challenged, he is going to fight a duel this morning.”

“Where !”

“On the racecourse at Auteuil.”

“And you are looking for him to prevent the duel ?”

“Or to die, if he is killed. Let me go, it is the hour, twelve o’clock. I fear that I shall arrive too late.”

“Arrive where ? For this is the course,” returned Mlle. de Gauges pointing it out to her friend.

Diana’s finger indicated a large meadow, which began from the thickets planted round the lake, and stretched away out of sight forming one immense field full of little rises and declivities, and studded here and there with clumps of trees. Not a soul was to be seen on the wide expanse

of turf, and the Stands, which stood some hundred yards away from the water and which on race days were filled with a seething tumultuous crowd, were now absolutely empty.

"Heaven be praised, I am in time," murmured Valentine, "but by which road will they come?"

"By the same one that you have," answered Mlle. de Ganges, gazing with compassion on her unhappy friend. "You can wait for them here, if you persist in your design; but you will, I am sure, permit me to demonstrate to you how extravagant it is. You cannot hinder a man from fighting. Even if you manage to stop this meeting, you will gain nothing by it, for the duel will only be put off until the next day, and your interference will but serve to increase your husband's anger against you, that husband whom you love so much, for he will never forgive you for making him appear ridiculous by flinging yourself between him and his adversary."

"I shall know at least if he survives the encounter."

"And you will offer up prayers that he may return safe and unhurt. My poor friend, will you never cure yourself of this fatal love for a man utterly unworthy of you. But who is he going to fight with, and for what reason?"

"I do not know."

"And yet you know that he is going to fight—I cannot understand it. Did M. de Sartilly tell you of this duel?"

"He! oh, no."

"Who was it, then?"

"It was Lisa, my former maid, who has remained faithful to me. Gontran had dismissed her, but she took a lodging opposite our house and found means to visit me secretly by night. Gontran forbade it, but——"

"I suppose he also forbade you to write to me, since you never answered my letter?"

"Yes, and may heaven grant that he may never learn that I have met you—Lisa knew of the duel through his valet Francis."

"A villain."

"He knew that Gontran was going to fight some one, whose name Francis did not know, and that his seconds were M. de Mussidan and M. de Saint Senier."

"A nice choice indeed."

"They were to fight to-day at twelve."

"Then they are late, or else the duel has been put off. Whichever it may be, I hope that you will remain with me, and I will endeavour to console you; then the delay will be

less hard to bear. From where we stand we shall be able to see them coming, for this spot commands the country all round us." Mlle. de Ganges did not say all she knew; she had read in the papers of duels taking place in rear of the Stands, and she thought that even now the Count de Sartilly might be standing sword in hand behind one of these out of sight of his wife, who little thought that he was risking his life so close to her. But she took care not to say a word of this, and inwardly hoped that Gontran might succumb, but she did not consider this likely, for she knew that he was a perfect master of his weapon. She would not have felt so comfortable had George Cézambre been the Count's opponent, but happily George was in Paris, far from the spot where Gontran was fighting.

"You have broken off entirely with your husband?" said she, more to occupy Mme. de Sartilly, than to learn the secrets of the unhappy household, of which she guessed, although she did not know the veritable position. Diana was ignorant of the attempted loan, and she still believed that Gontran, in order to tyrannise over his wife, used as a pretext the pistol shots which had been fired some six weeks before.

"Broken to such a degree that he never enters my room," murmured Valentine.

"He came there, however, upon that memorable night in which he surprised George."

"Yes, and he remained there, but I have not seen him since alone. I only see him when it pleases him to take me out into society, for outwardly nothing is changed, and when I am forced to accompany him to a ball it is an additional punishment for me."

"It has been like that for more than a year. Was it a passing fancy then that brought him back to you?"

"A fancy, or a deep calculation. He wanted to borrow money from my father."

"And he entrusted the negotiation to you, and you did not succeed. Now I begin to understand."

"He never forgave me for not having succeeded, and heaven only knows how repugnant it was to my feelings to make the attempt, for I foresaw that my father would remain deaf to my prayers."

"He did well not to yield. Your husband would bring him to beggary; and so, because your father would not lend him money, he revenges himself upon you?"

"Yes, most cruelly."

"But what does he do? He does not maltreat you physically, I hope."

"He has never been more gentle and considerate. He sends the servants to me every morning to take my orders for the day, he never enters my apartments, without first inquiring if I will receive him, but we live quite apart, and his polite contempt is breaking my heart. I had sooner that he would beat me."

"Ah," murmured Diana. "You are not cured, and you never will be. I have no remedy for an evil that has eaten into your blood. But I can at least defend you against your husband. I can guess that his conduct has some hidden end, and that he has reasons for treating you with courtesy that I do not yet see, but some day he will throw aside the mask, and then——"

"My life is threatened," concluded Mme. de Sartilly, "but what does that matter, I care nothing for my life."

"But I do not wish that you should die, and in order to protect you I must know everything. What did he want to do with the money that he tried to get from your father?"

"He wished to run horses. He has gone into partnership with M. de Saint Senier; they have started their stable and have horses entered for the present racing season."

"Then he has managed to get funds—but how? That old miser, Saint Senier, has not advanced them to him. He must have gone to some money-lender. I hope that you signed nothing?"

"He did not even ask me to do so."

"That is fortunate," answered Mlle. de Ganges, with a smile, "I suppose that he calculates on the money that he will make on the races, but he will not do so, for Providence would never permit it; but when the day for payment comes, some fresh attack will be made on you."

"I am resigned—and I know that my father will remain inflexible should Gontran again address himself to him."

"Do you still see your father?"

"Yes, but secretly."

"What, has your husband forbidden you to see him?"

"Yes, and even to go to him; but for that matter my father would not set foot in our house. We meet in the Parc Monceaux. I write to him, Lisa takes him my letters, and he keeps the appointments I make."

"And does he suffer his daughter to live in such a state of slavery?"

"He has entreated me to go and live with him, and to sue for a divorce, but I have refused to do so."

"Oh, most certainly Gontran has bewitched you. What can be done to break the spell. Has jealousy any power over you? Yes, it must have, as you adore him: no love

without jealousy. Well, suppose I show you your husband as he is, if I tell you that he deceives you, if I tell you that he proposed to me to become his mistress?"

"Tell me nothing, I wish to know nothing. I suffer enough already in living the life I lead, but I do not pity myself. Do not try to advise me. I will not listen to you, leave me alone to seek for Gontran; the time that was fixed for the duel has passed, perhaps he is fighting close here. They told me that it was to be on the racecourse, but that extends a long way. No doubt the road that I took to come here was not the shortest, so I will go on."

"I hope you do not intend to go round the course in your cab."

"No, I will go on foot."

"Not without me. I will not leave you to find your way alone about all these damp fields, and if you will trust to me, we will first follow this road that comes out by the big cedar near the Grand Stand."

"The Stands? yes, that was where they were going to fight. Now I recollect last year to have read of a duel which took place there. Remain here, or follow me at a distance. Oh, if Gontran were only to see you!"

"Yes, I know what you mean! he has forbidden you to speak to me, but he will not see me, for should I catch a glimpse of him, I will go away. I have no desire to be a party to your explanation with him, but if anything has happened to him, you will be glad enough to have me by your side."

"Come then, if you must," exclaimed Valentine, and she hurried down the road, closely followed by Diana, who was determined not to leave her friend, should she even meet Gontran face to face. The cab in which the Countess had come, remained stationary in the road to the fortifications, The path that led to the cedar was not a long one, and they met no persons as they hurried along it. "I can see carriages over there by the stands," observed Diana.

"The carriages in which they have come," murmured Valentine, "they are waiting for them, therefore the duel is not yet over."

"There is a cab, and a private carriage."

"Yes, and I think that the private carriage is Gontran's, but who can he have fought with?"

"Ah, here are those gentlemen coming towards the cab, one of them is wounded and is leaning on the shoulder of the others, and it seems to me that he has his arm in a sling. At this distance I cannot see his face, but I am sure that it is not your husband."

"No, no, it is not he," exclaimed Valentine.

"And there is nothing to prove that he has been fighting with M. de Sartilly," added Mlle. de Ganges, whose object was to persuade Valentine to retrace her steps.

"On the contrary all goes to prove that he has been wounded by Gontran, for he was to fight this morning, and it is not likely another duel should have been fought at the same time and place."

"Well, then," said Diana, "your mind is set at rest about your husband, as it is his antagonist that has been wounded, so let us get away."

"No, not yet, Gontran is perhaps also wounded, or killed."

"Do you think that they have run on to each other's swords. You give too loose a rein to your imagination. Such things only happen in novels, when the author not knowing how to get rid of his characters invents some unlikely *finale*."

Valentine paid no heed to the words of her friend, but followed with her eyes the cab as it drove off in the direction of the cedar, carrying away the conquered man, and his seconds. The carriage, however, had not moved, nor did the other party put in an appearance. What could they be doing behind the Stand when the affair was finished. It was not the custom to remain chatting upon the spot where the duel had taken place. And this delay almost warranted the Countess in believing that something had happened to her husband. "Leave me," said she abruptly, "if you are afraid of his seeing you; I must go and learn my fate," and she moved forward. Diana hesitated for an instant, but made up her mind directly. "I cannot abandon her," thought she. "And after all, what do I care if I do meet this man. He will see me on Sunday at the races. I had just as soon that he should see me at once." She soon caught up Valentine, who seemed to be almost out of her mind, but they walked side by side in silence. They were just turning the corner of the Grand Stand, when Mme. de Sartilly stopped short. The sound of voices struck on her ear: one was that of her husband, alternating with another which was not so familiar to her, but whose accents she soon recognised.

"I think that I have given him a sufficient lesson," observed Gontran.

"Three inches of steel in the shoulder; he will be laid up for three weeks, exactly like that insolent Colonel Tarsac whom I had the pleasure of pricking in your presence some two months ago." This reply was made in the tones of M. de Saint Senier, who continued: "And now that you have corrected this gentleman, will you have the goodness to tell

me why you provoked him, for deuce take me if I know, though I consented to act as your second. You said nothing of your motives to me, nor was he any more communicative when I called upon him on your behalf. When I went I found a man buttoned up to the chin. He did not belong to the same sphere as ourselves, but I must allow that he was most courteous, and behaved very well during the encounter, and though he has not your skill, yet he knows how to handle a sword."

"He nearly got home twice."

"I saw he did ; he had a certain way of disengaging that gave me the cold shivers ; had you not come to the parry sharp, he would have spitted you to a moral. But I again ask you in what way he offended you, and how you became acquainted with this civil engineer, who belongs to no club, and does not, I expect, go into society ?"

"I have disliked him for a long time."

"I know that ; the Marquis de Muire recommended him to me and I was going to employ him to bore our Artesian wells at Mortcerf, when you asked me to have nothing to do with him. Then I engaged someone else, and I heard no more of this M. Trévières until I waited upon him as your second."

"My dear fellow," returned Gontran, "I beg that you will dispense with my replying to you regarding the cause of our quarrel. Consider, if you like, that this gentleman has spoken about me in a way that I would not tolerate, any more than you cared to submit to Colonel Tarsac's jeers."

"Oh ; very good, I understand, and quite approve of your conduct. We live in days when gentlemen must not permit outsiders to mix in their affairs. What I did on account of my wife, you may have done for some other reason, for the behaviour of yours is irreproachable."

The Countess and her friend did not lose a word of this dialogue. Diana had grasped Valentine's hand, and tried to draw her away : but Valentine resisted. Astonishment and an inexplicable feeling of anguish rooted her to the spot. Henry Trévières had been fighting on her account, and she knew no more than M. Saint Senier, the cause of the quarrel, which might have had a tragic conclusion. She had almost forgotten her father's friend, though she had agreed to accept him as her champion, when he had offered to come to her assistance, should she have need of his aid. But since their short conversation on the pavement of the Rue de la Neva, she had never summoned him, and she knew no reason why he should have sought a quarrel with her husband. She scarcely even pitied him for having been wounded by the man she persisted in loving.

Mlle. de Ganges guessed what was passing in the bosom of her unfortunate friend, and foresaw what was about to happen. The time for flight had passed. The voices came nearer, and a meeting with the speakers was inevitable ; but she did not for a moment think of retreating. She preferred rather to meet the Count face to face, than to desert his wife. She even hoped that by remaining she might divert the storm from Valentine's head to her own, and she prepared bravely to meet the shock. It came soon enough. Saint Senier first made his appearance closely followed by Gontran, who on turning the corner found himself face to face with his wife. There was a momentary pause on both sides. When two hostile advanced guards meet in a narrow road, they hesitate for a few seconds before rushing in with the bayonet. Mlle. de Ganges was the first to commence the attack. "Gentlemen," said she, with perfect coolness, "I just now met Mme. de Sartilly who was in search of her husband. She had learned that he was going to fight. I accompanied her thus far, and like her, I am delighted to find that the encounter has ended without any serious result."

Saint Senier gazed on Diana with marked interest. He lived so near the Sartillys that he had often seen her, but never so closely as to-day, and he inspected her with a critical eye.

Gontran gazed on her too ; but he also cast a glance on Valentine which froze her heart with dread. But he soon resumed the mastery over himself, and put on the serious and injured expression of a husband whose wife has acted in a most imprudent manner.

"Did you not understand that this was no place for you ?" asked he with affected gentleness.

"I heard that you were about to risk your life," stammered Mme. de Sartilly, "and had I remained at home I should have died of suspense."

"And being unable to endure it you hastened here. I am not, of course, angry with you for this evidence of affection ; but I cannot refrain from telling you that had you arrived whilst we were fighting you might have placed me in a most ridiculous position in the eyes of my adversary. My seconds and his might have thought that you had come here out of anxiety for him."

This nasty hint made poor Valentine's cheek grow pale, but she had no strength left to contradict him. "You know very well that that is false," exclaimed Mlle. de Ganges passionately, "and you ought to be grateful to her instead of accusing her."

"I am grateful to you, too, mademoiselle," returned Gontran

with an equivocal smile, "for having accompanied her thus far, and I am happy to see that in leaving our house you have not entirely forgotten us all."

"I only think of the friend of my childhood," answered Diana, drily.

"Permit me then to have a better memory," replied the Count in a tone full of double meaning. "And now, my dear," he added, addressing his wife, "you will, I hope, come home with me. How did you get here?"

"I took a cab——"

"Which is in the road to the fortifications," interrupted Diana. "I will undertake to dismiss it. I was here by mere chance when Valentine got out of it, and I shall know the coachman again."

"I will escort you there, mademoiselle," said Saint Senier, quickly, who admired Diana immensely.

"Thank you, sir, but I require no escort."

"Besides, my dear fellow," added Sartilly, "here is your carriage waiting, and Alfred de Mussidan, who has taken charge of the swords, counts on you to take him home."

Saint Senier, who had served his apprenticeship in intrigue, understood at once that Gontran had some ulterior views regarding his wife's former companion, and immediately yielded to the hint that he had received.

"And so," thought he, "you have an eye on that magnificent creature. However, this is not the moment to enter the lists with you; but I shall find her again, for she is bound to be in this neighbourhood." The carriages came up. Saint Senier hurried into his, after having raised his hat to the ladies, and shaken Sartilly by the hand. Valentine remained standing in the road between her husband and her friend, suffering a strange kind of martyrdom. She felt that her husband was only taking her away to make her endure some sort of punishment for her rash proceeding, and that his affected kindness was a mere farce, and that the only ones who really loved her were Diana and Henri Trévières, who had just shed his blood for her; whilst at the same time she did not dare to express any pity for the wounded man, or throw herself into the arms of her friend. The Count opened the door of the carriage, and after handing in his wife took his place by her side, not without having cast a meaning glance at the beautiful auburn-haired woman with the emerald eyes.

"That carriage, with its armorial bearings, which is carrying away Valentine, is like the tumbrel that carries the criminal to the scaffold," murmured Mlle. de Ganges; "that man will kill my unhappy friend if I do not intervene; but

I will know what he is plotting against her, even if I have to let him make love to me in order to learn it. I must also see M. Trévières, for he will be a valuable ally, and George will let me do as I like when I tell him all."

CHAPTER XIV

ON THE COURSE.—PART I

It was Sunday.—The first Sunday of the Longchamps races, and anyone who had lived in the days of the late Paul de Kock would never recognise Paris as it now is. Where are the worthy shopkeepers who used to go out to picnic on the grass of the Près Saint Gervais? Where are the clerks and shop-girls who climbed the hills of Romainville to pluck the lilacs and seek for the nuts? The beautiful woods, so fondly appreciated by lovers, have disappeared to make room for a fort bristling with cannon. Now-a-days shopkeepers take a cab, and are driven about the Champs Elysées; the counter-jumpers club together to put a louis on a horse, and the shop-girls, if they are pretty, appear on the course in hired victorias. The city is deserted. Parisians of both sexes, and of all classes, walk or drive to the Bois de Boulogne. If you take a bird's-eye view, the foot passengers look like a colony of migrating ants, marching in close column, whilst the carriages follow after in one endless line, raising clouds of dust. Hardly can the wide-spreading lawn of Longchamps contain the vast concourse that throngs thither to witness the sport. The grass disappears beneath the feet of the multitude, and the trees which surround the course bear bunches of human fruit. By the side of the ropes which mark out the course are the long lines of glittering vehicles, massed together like vessels in the harbour of Hâvre.

There, mingled together in one conglomeration, are the carriages of ladies of rank, covered with armorial bearings, the coquettish victorias of the best-known of the irregular brigade, and the four-in-hands of the pillars of the sporting world, with their long white reins.

The feminine element predominates in the carriages. The men only come for the horses, and wander unhappily about amongst the carriages, the wheels of which are locked closely together. There is an immense crowd round the weighing-place, and ladies can hardly pass there unless on the arm of an experienced guide.

The middle-classes occupy the graduated seats of the stands, which with the variously-tinted parasols look like one vast

hill covered with flowers and poppies. The bookmakers are at their posts supported by their clerks, pencil and book in their hands, and it is a wonderful sight to see them in the short intervals between the races handle thousands, and even millions of francs with astounding precision and rapidity, and which would make clerks in a banking-house open their eyes. They will in less than a minute book bets on different horses to the extent of three or four thousand louis, in different amounts. Their books are divided into columns, and immediately a start is made a bookmaker who understands his business knows to a louis what the victory of any horse which he has laid against will cost him, and what sum he will gain by the field, that is to say, by any of the other horses winning. There are also some *bookmakeresses*, if it is permitted to coin a word, who have little of their sex about them except their costume: these carry a huge bag slung across their shoulders, boots with thick soles resembling a laundress' iron. They come on the course in an English waggonette with their assistants, who resemble them greatly in manner and appearance. They stand under enormous umbrellas, and shout in hoarse voices, "Look at our prices, gentlemen."

There are numerous women who bet. The old stagers who endeavour to obtain from their lovers useful tips about the horses that have been entered, and the neophytes who try to get their friends to put something on for them. There are some who occupy themselves very little about the horses, but take a good deal of interest in the riders, whom they follow everywhere, even into the taverns, and pay by caresses for a hint more or less valuable regarding the probable winners.

The first race is over, and the second is about to be run. A long-legged fellow dressed in regular English style passes rapidly along crying out "seven." This means that out of the ten horses entered, seven will run, and he gives out this information which he has learned in the weighing-house, for the benefit of the bookmakers so that they may be thoroughly posted up to begin their business. This man in sporting slang is termed an "*all right*," because after the race has been run, he assists in the weighing-house, and when the weight of the winning jockey has been ascertained to be correct, he will cry out with all the force of his lungs the sacramental words "*all right*" to the bookmakers, who will then pay up what they may have lost.

George Cézambre had never found himself at such a scene before, and he understood very little of what was going on under his eyes. The spectacle was a dazzling one, but all

these people who appeared so wildly excited, seemed to him to be mere madmen, and Diana laughed at the unconcealed surprise of her young lover. They had driven to the course in a very handsome victoria, made by one of the best Parisian builders, drawn by a high-actioned horse, driven by Domingo in a handsome livery. Having come early, they had secured a place next to the course, facing the stand, and not far from the winning post, but they were entirely blocked in by the other carriages which formed up around them, and they had not yet ventured on foot into this labyrinth. But Diana did not intend to remain there all day; she wished to show herself upon her lover's arm, so that no one might be ignorant that she was living with him. She wished to brave both Madame de Saint Senier, and Gontran de Sartilly, and to laugh at his partner if he should attempt to make love to her, as she believed he would certainly do after their meeting on the racecourse at Auteuil. But what she desired above anything was to see Valentine, to speak to her, and to ask her how her husband had treated her and to offer to defend her. She did not for a moment doubt but that the husband had punished his wife by compelling her to come with him to the races, and she felt sure that after he had once got her there he would leave her alone for the allurements of the betting ring, and therefore she hoped to see her alone. The question to be solved was as to where Gontran had left her. In his fine landau, no doubt, but how to find it out in this vast collection of equipages. Then if the Count had taken his wife into the weighing enclosure, Diana would be unable to seek her there, for that was forbidden ground to her, now that she had assumed the position that she had. George would not for a moment have hesitated to escort her there, but then George who had only recently arrived in Paris, was not a member of any club, and did not possess the necessary ticket, which gives the right of entrance to this reserved enclosure.

He was there close to her, her beloved George, standing up in the carriage, and watching a race which had just commenced, though he took but little interest in it. Diana might well be proud of him, for the eyes of all the women were on him, but these women were unknown to Diana, who only wished Mme. de Saint Senier to see him, as she would almost expire with rage when she caught sight of him with her.

But this truly feminine sentiment did not cause her to forget Mme. de Sartilly, and she determined to make a bold attempt. When she had returned from her walk by the Lake of Auteuil she had told George everything, and had confided

to him her fears regarding Valentine, the only woman of whom she was not jealous. George had seen sufficient of her to recognise her again, and Diana's idea was to send him in search of her. "Go and look for her, I beg of you," said she, after she had explained to him her reasons for desiring to come across the Countess. "You will get through this collection of carriages more easily than I shall, and I feel sure that she is here. As soon as you have found her you will come back to me, and will take me to her carriage, where you will leave me. Your presence would only embarrass us, and I am sure you do not want that to happen. Will you do that for me, my George?"

"I will do anything for you," answered George, "only I am afraid of losing myself."

"Come where you see my white plume wave," exclaimed Diana, gaily putting up her crape parasol trimmed with rows of lace. "Whatever may happen I shall not move from here, and if you meet with Mme. de Saint Senier, I shall expect you not to allow her to carry you off."

George smiled, sprang out of the victoria, and threw himself boldly into the mass of vehicles, through which he had great difficulty in making his way, and moved off in the direction of the winning post, determining to scrutinise closely the triple rank of carriages, and then to return the way he had come. The race had just been run, the number of the winner had been put up, and the crowd had invaded the course, whilst those who had been lucky in their bets were gathering round the bookmakers to draw their money. George was soon swept away by the current, and he made vain efforts to disengage himself when he was thrust against a gentleman, who, seizing him familiarly by the arm, exclaimed, "Do you know, young man, that I have a bone to pick with you? Here you are consigned to me by one of my old friends from Mauritius. You call on me; I and my wife receive you with open arms; when, presto, you are gone, and for two whole months you show no signs of life. I can tell you that Mme. de Saint Senier will give it you hot."

"Pardon me," stammered George, who would willingly have consigned to the fiend the husband of Mme. de Saint Senier, "but now I am living a very retired life —"

"Good, I know," interrupted Saint Senier with a loud laugh. "You left Paris to build your nest in the woods, and I congratulate you on your taste. Mlle. de Ganges is charming. But that is no reason for you to hide yourself—quite the contrary. And I see with much pleasure that you have at last decided to emerge from your retirement, and to take her about with you, for I suppose that she is here?"

George fell at once from the clouds, and did not know what to say to this elderly gentleman, who ought certainly to have given him better advice, yet who congratulated him with having taken a mistress, and counselled him to show himself openly with her ; but he was destined to be still more astonished.

"My dear boy," continued the cynical Viscount, "you are happy in being young, and I can, without hurting your feelings, tell you that you are deficient in experience. You are travelling in strange lands, and you want a guide. Permit me to pilot you through the Parisian world into which you have just made your entry. I know all its reefs and quicksands, and will show you how to avoid them. The most dangerous of them is solitude, more especially when one is, like you are, destined to enter into the future possession of an immense fortune. 'Nobility has its duties,' as the proverb says well. Money has its responsibilities also. You must live according to your position. You must have carriages and horses, so that you may not be compelled to take your mistress about in a cab——"

"I have two horses and a couple of carriages," answered George, partly to vindicate himself, and partly to get rid of an adviser whose counsels he did not require.

"Very good," exclaimed Saint Senier ; "that is a good beginning, and I am sure that Mlle. de Ganges must approve of it. But you must not stop there. I am sure you will not be contented with living in a style that any petty individual heir could aspire to. You must have your own rooms, and belong to a club. I will put you up at an excellent one."

"I thank you much, but I have no taste for club life."

"Ah, be frank, dear boy, and say at once that you are afraid of displeasing your mistress. I can well understand that, and she is worth the trouble of pleasing. But let me re-assure you. She may complain a little at first, but she will thank you afterwards for having been firm, for she has sufficient sense to know that the most passionate love cannot withstand a life spent entirely together, and that some little innocent distractions serve to make it more enduring. Love grows much stronger when you are not together every hour in the day, and the pleasure of meeting again is enhanced by an occasional short separation. If I never kept away from home I should have quarrelled with my wife ten years ago."

George hardly knew whether to laugh or to be angry at this last speech, which he looked upon as the height of impudence on the part of his new friend, who continued to keep a tight hold of his arm, and kept up the conversation with the utmost coolness.

"Very well then, that is all settled. I will put you up at my club, and as you know no one I will get some one to second you—Count Gontran de Sartilly, my friend and partner."

George was at first inclined to decline this proposal point blank, but then he reflected that in order to do it he would be compelled to explain to M. de Saint Senier the exact position in which he stood with regard to M. de Sartilly, and to make matters perfectly clear he would have to begin at the very commencement of the incident, and he felt unwilling to denounce his wife's conduct to the Count. George therefore preferred to remain silent, and sought for some pretext to release himself from his tormentor. He remembered that Diana was waiting for him, and that he could not continue his search for Mme. de Sartilly without first getting rid of M. de Saint Senier. But the bore still clung to him with tenacity.

"You will get in without a black ball," continued he, "and you will always find a good game to cut into."

"I care very little for play," muttered George.

"All the better for you; but surely you are fond of horses?"

"Passionately. I intend to ride every day."

"Very good; and in the meantime, why do you not take some interest in to-day's racing? Bet, my dear fellow, and if you will follow my tips you will bet on a certainty."

"I know nothing about betting."

"I will explain the whole mystery of it to you in a quarter of an hour, and you will know as much of it as I do. I am just now going to square up my account on the last race with the bookmaker, with whom I always do business. Come with me, and profit by my example. I must really initiate you into the secrets of the turf by making you win something, and after that I will restore you to liberty."

The promise contained in the last few words decided George, who thought that he might be free at the expense of a few wasted minutes and loss, and he vowed that he would take care not to fall again into the clutches of the Viscount. He therefore permitted himself to be led off into the heart of the crowd which was collecting round the bookmakers.

There are various classes of bookmakers. Some of them, but these are in the minority, are mere welshers, and make no bones of running off with the cash they have received if the result of the race is unfavourable to them. Others, more honest, but who have but a moderate capital, leave their rings, watches, and other jewellery as security in the hands of their more wealthy brethren for money to enable them to

meet their engagements. These men do not come to grief unless all the favourites win, and this is a very rare occurrence. Then there is the regular established bookmaker, and of these there are about a dozen, who have an office, a dozen clerks, and a well-filled strong box ; and the honesty of these men is beyond suspicion.

The gentlemen who bet heavily, generally do business with these men, and to be one of them, and successful, one must have the eye of a veteran detective, to catch in a group the person who asks for the odds, a fine sense of hearing, to detect the amount of the bet, and an extraordinary memory, to remember the name of the customer. The bookmaker must have a keen eye for any change of the odds amongst their neighbours ; one ear for the backer, who comes as mysteriously, and puts down a heavy sum on a horse and another for his agent of the intelligence department, termed in racing phraseology a "tout" who warns him to take all he can on the favourite who coughed the night before, and a smile for some old customer as he passes by that day without doing any business.

The bookmaker with whom M. de Saint Senier invariably transacted his business, was naturally one of those who gave liberal odds, and was in addition one of the few who paid up with a smile on his face, and who consoled an unlucky speculator by a sign of condolence. He saw M. de Saint Senier from some distance off, and shot a smile at him which seemed to say, "You cannot imagine the delight that I feel in paying you," and when the count arrived close to him he was almost enthusiastic in his demonstrations of joy, as he handed him a packet of ten thousand-franc notes, which the lucky winner joyfully showed to George, whispering as he did so : "My dear fellow, you see it is all most simple. Do as I do. The third race will be run directly. I know the horse that must win, he is at twenty to one. Risk fifty louis on him, or if you think that too much, put on twenty-five." And as George did not hurry himself to reply, Saint Senier said to the bookmaker : "A thousand louis on Black Radish, at twenty to one."

"Very good, my lord," answered the Englishman, without flinching, "Will you do it again ? Four times, six times, if you like."

"No, a thousand louis will do for me," and seizing George again by the arm, he drew him out of the crush. "You will see presently" said he, "that I know how to spot a winner. That fellow is sharp, but so am I, a bit sharper perhaps, for I had a tip that he hadn't, and I want you to share my luck. I have put you down for fifty louis in my

bet. Don't say a word, it is done, and I am going back to the weighing enclosure. I shall look for you after the race. I suppose you have come in your new carriage? are you near the winning, or the starting post?"

"The starting post," answered George.

"Good, I shall find you then. Give my compliments to Mlle. de Ganges." And with this unpleasant conclusion M. de Saint Senier turned on his heel, leaving George in much perplexity, and very angry with himself. He was annoyed at having permitted himself to be carried off in this manner, instead of having executed the orders of his dear Diana, and he asked himself how he was going to acquit himself of the mission which he had not yet even begun.

An immense line of vehicles still remained for him to inspect and he deeply regretted the time that he had wasted with the officious M. de Saint Senier, for he was afraid that Mlle. de Ganges would commence to grow impatient. He therefore in a rather melancholy mood once more commenced his pilgrimage along the line of carriages drawn up close by the winning post. He came to the end of the line without seeing anything of Mme. de Sartilly, and he was about to return, when he noticed a woman standing near him who looked at him with a steady, and persistent air. She was young, and tolerably good-looking, but he could not recollect ever having seen her before. That this woman should take a delight in gazing on a good-looking young fellow like George Cèzambre, and that she did not attempt to conceal that she was doing so, was the more surprising because she did not appear to belong to either respectable, or fast society. She had not the air of a milliner who had deserted the workroom for the day, or an adventuress of the lower class. Her dress was plain, and in good taste, and she had the wide-awake air of a lady's-maid out for a holiday. Doubtless George would not have noticed her, had she not stared at him so boldly, and he was about to pass her by without asking her what she wanted, when she came up to him deliberately, saying, "I think that I have the honour of speaking to M. George Cèzambre?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle," returned George. "What do you want with me?"

"I was formerly lady's-maid to Mme. de Sartilly——"

"Indeed! but I do not know you."

"That is true, Monsieur has never seen me, but perhaps he has heard my name?"

"Whom from?"

"From Mlle. de Ganges, who may have mentioned it to Monsieur."

George then remembered that Diana after having met the Countess near the Lake of Auteuil, had told him of her conversation with her friend ; and in this conversation so full of melancholy confidences, Lisa's name had been mentioned as one who had remained true and faithful to her mistress, and who was always ready to aid and defend her. However, George asked himself how far he could trust this discharged waiting-maid who had accosted him in the middle of the racecourse. The intelligent girl read his thoughts at once. "I can see very well that Monsieur only puts half faith in me ; but I can re-assure Monsieur as to the honesty of my intentions. I was still with my mistress when Monsieur was wounded in our garden. Later on Madame told me all that had occurred. Neither she nor I knew that Monsieur was living with Mlle. de Ganges. It was Francis the Count's valet who told me."

Diana's prediction that the coachman of Mme. de Saint Senior gossiped with the servants of the Count de Sartilly, was thus verified, and George began to believe that Lisa was speaking the truth. "The day upon which she told me," continued the maid, "Madame had just met Mlle. de Ganges in the Bois de Boulogne, and as she has no secrets from me, because she knows that I am entirely devoted to her, she did not conceal from me what had happened. She might have sent me at once to Mademoiselle, for Francis had mentioned the situation of the villa, but she did not dare to do so ; but since then things have taken place which show that she had need of all her friends."

"What do you mean ?"

"Ah, Monsieur, my mistress's life has become a perfect hell. The Count never speaks to her except to overwhelm her with reproaches and threats ; he has her watched by an old cat, who was formerly in the service of one of his mistresses, and whom he has forced Madame to take as her maid. This creature is quite capable of poisoning her. Madame hardly ever sleeps now, and she is in continual fainting fits, and I, I assure you, am not on a bed of roses. I cannot break with Francis whom I detest, for if I close my door on him, he will go and tell his master that I am helping Madame—but I forgot that when I permitted myself to stop Monsieur, it was not to talk of myself."

"You have not yet told me how you were able to recognise me," interrupted George, who had not quite renounced his suspicions.

"That is very simple. Yesterday I went to the Villa Montmorency, and hung about the villa, I saw Mademoiselle in the balcony, with Monsieur by her side, and when one has once seen Monsieur, it is not easy to forget him."

George remained cold to the compliment of the lady's-maid.

"How did you know that you would meet me here to-day?" questioned he.

"I guessed that you would come here with Mademoiselle, and I came without warning the Countess. Had I not seen you, I should have come this evening to the Villa des Primevères, for it is full time that Mademoiselle de Ganges should come to our aid. I had only just arrived here, and was looking for her, when I caught sight of you."

"She *is* here, but what can she do for Madame de Sartilly?"

"Help me to persuade Madame to seek an asylum with her father. I have entreated her to do so, but she will not listen to me. And if Mademoiselle does not succeed any better than I do, I will go to M. Vacheron, and tell him plainly that his daughter's life is not safe in her husband's house, and that he must interfere. But I hope that Mademoiselle de Ganges' entreaties will carry the point, and that is why I beg that Monsieur will point out to me the spot where Mademoiselle is, so that I may go to her at once."

"Rather tell me where to find Madame de Sartilly, and when I shall have done so, I will take Mademoiselle de Ganges to her."

"Yes, that will be the better plan, the Count is busy in the ring, but if he saw me with Monsieur he would become suspicious directly. My lady is just here alongside of the ropes. If Monsieur will come a little way with me, I will show her to him at once."

This was all that George wanted, he gave himself up to Lisa's guidance, who took him to the end of the line of carriages, and showed him Madame de Sartilly seated in a magnificent open carriage. She was quite alone, and no one seemed to care to come near her, though the vehicles on all sides of her were surrounded by a gay and laughing throng. The unhappy have no friends, and the rumour had already spread that she was wretched, her husband had almost left her, and that was sufficient for society to shun her. George now saw how he had missed her before, the carriage was half hidden by a coach, full of many men about town, laughing girls in outrageous toilettes, and hampers full of champagne, the corks of which popped at every moment. Her noisy neighbours had annoyed poor Valentine greatly, and George was surprised that she remained there. He imagined, however, that it was in obedience to some order of her husband, and he was not

wrong. All, however, that he wanted to know was whereabouts she was. "I thank you," said he to Lisa, "I will go, and tell Mademoiselle de Ganges."

"And I," answered the maid quickly, "will remain here on sentry. If the Count should come to speak to Madame, I will make a sign to Mademoiselle that he is here, for he must not see her."

Now or never was the moment to recompense the kindly devotion of the girl, and George had put his hand into his pocket for his purse, when she perceived the movement.

"Ah, Monsieur," said she, taking the *pose* of Hippocrates refusing the gifts of Artaxerxes, "I do not require anything of the kind. I am only too happy to be of service to my mistress. But if I may venture to advise Monsieur, he will lose no time, for the Count will certainly rejoin Madame, when the last race has been run, and there is only one after this, and see the horses are coming in."

She was right, they came galloping in, in two divisions, the first of which was composed of three horses so close together, that it was almost impossible to say which was leading; the riders had settled down to work and were plying whip and spur vigorously; in another second the race would be lost and won, and the air rang with the names of the horses amongst which that of Black Radish, the favourite of M. de Saint Senier, could be plainly distinguished.

George had forgotten all about his bet, and hardly gave a thought to the money which he was going to win on an outsider that had started at twenty to one. He left the lady's-maid planted on the lawn by a post, by which he calculated to find the landau of the Countess again, and he pressed with difficulty through the crowd, which was now rushing madly towards the bookmakers' ring, and which he was obliged to cut through at right angles in order to reach Mademoiselle de Ganges' carriage. This was the moment when the crowd spread over the course, and communication was re-established between the spectators who had remained in their carriages, and the privileged visitors of the weighing enclosure. The stands emptied rapidly, for the ladies who occupied them did not disdain to hurry down on to the course, and swell the triumph of the winner who was returning with his rider on his back. All classes mingled together, and there was much confusion. Marquises and millionaires elbowed poor devils who had come to Long-champs to risk a few centimes, and young ladies of very equivocal character brushed against the dresses of high-born duchesses. After many efforts George succeeded in extricating himself from this torrent, and sought refuge between

the carriages. But the crowd was everywhere, and he still had the greatest difficulty in making his way, for every one had rushed to the carriages to convey the last intelligence, and however shabby might be the conveyance it was sure to be surrounded by men eager to tell the name of the winner to its fair occupants. George sought in vain for the rallying signal, the white plumes of a Louis XVI. hat which Diana wore ; at last, however, he perceived it some ten paces from him, but in a position which he was utterly unable to reach, from finding it impossible to pass between the wheels of two carriages which almost touched each other, and at the same time he saw that Diana was conversing with a gentleman who was familiarly resting his arm on the edge of the carriage in which she was seated.

CHAPTER XV

ON THE COURSE—PART II

THIS unexpected spectacle surprised George Cèzambre very much, but did not for a moment awaken his jealousy, for he believed in Diana's love, and the idea of her deceiving him, never entered his head. His was the age when all seems bright and fair, the age of enthusiasm and illusion, and the suspicions which a knowledge of the world teaches had no place in his youthful heart. Besides Mademoiselle de Ganges had a perfect right to speak to any one. She knew a great number, and most of them moved in the best society, and these she had met at the house of the Countess de Sartilly. It had pleased her to confine herself for six weeks to the Villa Primevères, and it was not her lover who had induced her to do so. On the past evening they had entered into a bond, that she should show herself openly as she had done before, and therefore it was quite natural that one of her former acquaintances should have come up to her, and equally natural that she should have entered into conversation with him. On the course, and with thousands of eyes watching, a private interview is not very compromising. George felt that he ought not to disurb that of Diana with a gentleman whose back he could only see, and who most probably he had never met in his life. The place was not eminently adapted for an introduction, and conversations in the open air seldom last very long. George said to himself that it was sufficient for him for Diana to see that he had come back, and if she desired him to draw nearer, she could easily make a sign to him, if however, on the contrary, she

preferred that he should not meet the gentleman with whom she was talking, she would presently dismiss her visitor, and then tell him all about it. Having therefore rapidly arrived at this decision, he went on a little further, and having by this means managed to get round the obstacle which had barred his progress, he posted himself at a little distance, so that Mademoiselle de Ganges would see him as soon as she happened to cast her eyes in his direction. She very soon did so, and gave him a glance which clearly signified, "Wait until I have finished, I shall not be long," and then continued her conversation with her visitor who had not remarked this brief by-play. And George waited more satisfied than ever. Diana had excellent reasons for not calling her lover up to her, before the Count de Sartilly had gone, for it was the Count, who having recognised her from the stand of the Jockey Club, where he was standing furnished with an excellent binocular, had had the audacity to come to her carriage. She had been careful not to refuse this advance on his part, and had accepted the encounter, as a man accepts a duel that has become inevitable. And she calculated that she might gain some advantage from it, which might help her to defend her old schoolmate. The attack had been brisk, and the return equally so. Gontran had commenced by direct propositions, to which Diana had retorted with insolent railleries. He offered to buy her, and she had answered that she was not for sale, that she adored her lover, and that if she ever did leave him it would not be to become the mistress of Valentine's persecutor. Upon this the Count had lost his temper, and had declared that he would one day get rid of his wife. The dialogue had reached this pitch at the moment when George made his appearance, and he certainly would have taken part in it had he known its edifying tone. "Are you going to divorce her then?" asked Mademoiselle de Ganges, ironically, "I defy you to do so! you would lose too much, my dear sir."

"Divorce is not looked on as respectable," sneered Gontran.
"Men of my position do not divorce their wives."

"What do they do then to get rid of them, when they find them in the way?"

"What does that matter to you? Would you marry me if I were a widower?"

"Not I. I have read the history of Blue Beard, and I would not risk meeting the fate of your first; besides, I think that you are capable of going through the whole seven."

"This is a bad time for a joke."

"What are you doing then? Do you think me fool enough

to take your matrimonial propositions in a serious light. If you had ever had the slightest intention of marrying me you would never have commenced by proposing to keep me."

"One does the best one can," replied Sartilly, with a mocking laugh, "whether I become a widower or not, I am determined that you shall be mine—and you shall be."

"Really, well I tell you that I will take you neither for a husband nor a lover."

"Because you are taken with that pretty baby whom you are bringing up by the bottle in your villa at Auteuil."

"I worship him."

"Then you are contented with the leavings of the Viscountess de Saint Senier?"

"If I replaced him by you, I should be taking the leavings of many others—but enough of this I am neither a prude, nor yet a flirt, and I might have listened to you had not my heart been already engaged, and had I not been Valentine's friend."

"Your fancy will pass away, and the second does not count, for you will be her friend no longer. I have forbidden her to speak to you, and I have taken steps to prevent her repeating her Auteuil folly, and if she continues to fatigue me with her ridiculous affection, I will ——"

"What will you do?"

"I will send her back to her father, where she can rejoin that engineer that I pricked the other day with a good sword thrust. She will be free, as I am now, for I have got a hold on her, and if I chose to live openly with you, no one could say a word against it."

"Except myself," returned Diana, smiling; "but you are boasting, you dare not give me your arm to escort me into the weighing enclosure. All your friends are there, and they all know my history."

"Do you really think that I dare not do so?" asked Sartilly fixing his eyes steadily on Diana. "Well, then, come, I am ready to escort you, and we will pass before my wife's carriage, which is at the other end of the lawn."

Diana trembled; she knew enough, and no longer doubted that Gontran was preparing to make away with his wife. The moment had arrived to end with him, and to fly to Valentine's help. She raised her head, and made a sign to George, who had not moved but was beginning to grow impatient.

"Are you coming?" asked the Count, offering his hand to assist her to get out of the carriage.

"Thank you, I can do without you, for my friend is coming back. I will introduce you to him."

George was already by the side of the carriage, and as Gontran turned sharply round he came face to face with him. They had never met although one had pursued the other through the darkness of a February night, and yet each instinctively recognised the other, before Diana named them.

"M. George Cézambre—M. the Count de Sartilly," said she, with the most perfect calmness.

George was very pale, and knew not what to do, but he did not lose countenance.

The Count glared upon his rival, turned on his heel, and went off saying, "My compliments to you, mademoiselle, and remember I am always at your orders," without taking the slightest notice of George Cézambre, but not without a familiar nod to Mlle. de Ganges. Diana did not give her lover the time to question her, she jumped from her carriage, took him by the arm, and drew him away. "Have you found Valentine?" added she.

"Yes, I know where she is, but ——"

"You would like to know what her husband has been saying to me. Well I will tell you, but first of all promise that you will take no steps without further consulting me. Later on you shall settle both our accounts with this man, but you must swear to me not to seek a quarrel with him to-day."

"No, not to-day, for he has disappeared, and I should have some trouble in finding him, but——"

"That is all I ask, and now, why should I conceal it from you; again to-day this man asked me to be his mistress. You can guess my reply, and I called you up on purpose to show him how much I valued his offers. Then he understood that I was laughing at him, and I hope that he will not re-commence. But I tremble for his wife, and I must see her at once. Where is she?"

"At the other end of the course."

"Have you spoken to her?"

"No, her former maid pointed her out to me."

"What, is Lisa here?"

"She came expressly to see you, she knows that we are living together, she heard it from the Count's valet, Francis."

"Francis? Ah, I had foreseen that. What does she want with me?"

"To tell you that your friend's life is not secure whilst she is under the same roof with her husband, and to beg you to come to her help."

"Yes, Lisa is a staunch girl, and like her, I think that the time has come for me to mix myself up with my poor Valentine's affairs. At Auteuil the other day, she would

not listen to me, but this time she will do so, when I tell her that the wretch Gontran has offered to marry me."

"What, he dared ——?"

"He dares anything, and recoils before no crime. Up to the present Valentine has not had the courage to break with him. She must not go back to his house to-night. You must be present at my interview with her. Are we far from her carriage now?"

"No, I can see the maid who is waiting for us close to it."

"And I," said Diana, hurriedly, can see M. de Saint Senier coming from the other side."

"I have already met him, when I was in search of Mme. de Sartilly, and he overwhelmed me with offers of service. He declared that he would put up my name at his club."

"Let him do so, I will tell you why afterwards; but now I wish to avoid him. I do not think that he has seen us yet. Do you go and meet him, and keep him with you, whilst I go and meet Lisa who will take me to Valentine. When you have got rid of him go and wait for me at the carriage, and have all ready for leaving as soon as I come. It is not impossible that I may bring Mme. de Sartilly with me."

George did not half like this arrangement, but there was no time to discuss it. Diana was already some distance off, and M. de Saint Senier was approaching with hasty steps, so that it was better to stop him by speaking to him, otherwise chance might lead him in the same direction as Diana had taken. M. de Saint Senier appeared to be looking for some one, and as soon as he saw George he ran up to him with all the air of a messenger of good news. "Well," exclaimed he, "confess that I have spotted a winner." George did not in the least comprehend this bit of racing slang, and so the Viscount had to put matters more clearly. "Black Radish came in first, beating Stewpan by half a length;" then as George still seemed not to understand, he added, "I put fifty louis on Black Radish for you. You have gained twenty thousand francs, which I have brought you. Have you forgotten all about the bet? I have been looking for you for more than a quarter of an hour, to give them to you."

George gazed at the bank-notes with a stupefied air of amazement, and hesitated to take them, but Saint Senier thrust them into his hand, saying: "Stow them away, my dear fellow—this is your first gain, and I hope it will not be your last, for I trust that we shall do some more business together. I am sure that it is you that have brought me this luck. I should have won two hundred thousand francs had I not been weak enough to give up two-thirds of the bet to some of my club friends, but I don't grumble, and all I want is to begin again."

"But this is not for me," stammered George, "and I do not think that I ought to take it."

"Take it? that is delightful. Why it is yours, unless indeed you would like to make it a present to our worthy William Oxwall, the bookmaker, who has just paid it to me. All that you have to do is to put it away safely in your pocket-book. It seems to me that it has just come in handy, since you have been buying carriages and horses, and I am sure that your charming friend, Mlle. de Ganges, will like you none the less because you have just won a thousand louis."

George was about to protest that Diana was totally indifferent to money, but the Viscount went on without giving him time to speak. "Now that you have started so well, I hope that you will not stop. Fortune smiles on you. She is like a woman, you must take her at once, and she will shower her favours on you. Commence by starting a proper establishment immediately. You will soon get tired of the air of the country. I know of a little house in the Avenue Friedland which would just suit you, and would certainly please Mlle. de Ganges. And to keep up an appearance worthy of her, and of yourself, who will in a year at latest be a millionaire three or four times over, throw yourself into the ring. I will answer for your success, and I bitterly regret that I did not know before that you were so lucky. Why did you hide yourself away for six whole weeks? I could have given you a good share in the stable that I have started, and would have allowed you eighteen months' credit to have paid in your share—and when I think that instead of doing so, I took my friend Sartilly who has the devil's own bad luck, for a partner, I *do* curse, I can assure you. Will you believe it," continued Saint Senier, after a short pause, "that in the race in which we have won such a pretty little sum, Sartilly has lost four thousand louis in backing a brute that was not even placed. Oxwall told me of it, and Sartilly owes him the four thousand louis. He never spots the right one, and I tremble for the success of our partnership. Ill luck is catching, but I hope that your good fortune will counterbalance his bad. If another opportunity presents itself I will let you know. But in the meantime it is settled that I put you up at my club, only I will find you another secondar than poor Gontran, he might bring you ill luck."

George was half inclined to say that he did not wish any one to second him, but Diana had advised him to be made a member, and he thought that she must have good reasons for wishing it, he therefore replied, "As you like, only I do not think that I shall be a very regular attendant, and I do not play."

"But you must play, do you hear, when a man has luck like yours he is a fool not to profit by it in every way, and you see that you will win at baccarat as you have on the race. But what have you done with your fair friend? Shall we go and consult her about your entrance into the club, I am sure that she will be of my opinion."

George could not very well agree to this proposition, and he was seeking for some means of getting out of it, when the Viscount exclaimed, "Hulloa! there is my wife, and it seems to me that she is looking for me, I cannot for a moment think what she can have to say to me, but if she has come to ask me to take her into the weighing enclosure, I cannot decently refuse, I am a free husband, but still I am never uncivil to her."

"Then I will take leave of you," returned George, delighted to profit by the opportunity of getting rid of the Viscount, and of avoiding the Viscountess. It was indeed Mme. de Saint Senier who was coming up followed by a tall footman, but whether it was her husband that she was looking for was a matter of doubt, and she would have had sufficient self-possession to have spoken to George in her husband's presence, who indeed did all he could to keep him.

But George saved himself by a precipitate flight, and managed to mingle with the crowd that was besieging the tent where Rouzé, the lemonade seller to the Society for the Encouragement of the Breeding of Horses, was dispensing his refreshing drinks.

George still held in his hand the twenty thousand francs which the Viscount had forced on him, and he would willingly have scattered them over the turf, had he not feared to be followed by a crowd, who whilst picking them up would have looked upon him as a madman, and pointed him out as such to the police. He decided at last to put them in his pocket, and take Diana's advice regarding their disposal, and with the view of obeying her instructions he made his way to the spot where he had left the victoria under the charge of Domingo. The worthy negro had not moved from his seat, and took no heed of the chaff of the other coachmen. He was fond of horses and took much interest in the races, but he loved his master more, and testified his joy at seeing him by a liberal display of his white teeth. Mlle. de Ganges had not yet come back, and she kept them waiting a long time, and the last race was about to be run before she returned.

"Let us go," cried she shortly, to her lover, "we can do no more here."

"Have you seen Mme. de Sartilly?" asked George.

"No, I have only seen Lisa, and what she has told me has made me feel very uncomfortable. She was there when the Count came back, he was half mad with rage."

"Yes, he had lost very heavily."

"And he will vent his anger on Valentine. He got into the carriage without saying a word to her, gave his orders to the coachman, and they drove off. I do not know what will take place at their house, but I have great fears for her, but I will never desert her."

"What do you intend to do?"

"I do not know yet, but I have now a means of communication with her every day, or rather every night. Lisa has the key of a little gate which leads into the grounds, she can go in whenever she likes, and Mme. Sartilly can go and meet her. She is a good girl, and I have every confidence in her. I have taken her into my service so as always to have her at hand. You know I was in want of a maid."

"You have done well to engage her. Where is she?"

"On the way to the villa, and as she is going on foot we shall be there before her. I wish to be there to receive her."

"Go on," said George, to his coachman.

Domingo turned at once into a space left vacant by the departure of one of the carriages which had been drawn up alongside, and they drove towards the entrance of the course. George was a little annoyed; he thought that Diana, occupied herself too much with the Countess, and not sufficiently with him. His mistress guessed his thoughts, and whispered to him softly, "I have never loved you so much as I do now, and I will be all yours, when I shall no more fear for Valentine, but first let me save her."

CHAPTER XVI

THREE CONSPIRATORS

HENRI TREVIÈRES lived in the Boulevard de Courcelles, near the Parc Monceaux, not very far from the Rue de la Neva where M. Vacheron's house was situated. His windows faced the gate of the park, and his rooms were very comfortable and situated on the fourth floor, with a balcony from which there was a magnificent view. Trévières, though he was nothing but a civil engineer, had inherited from his father, some twenty thousand francs per annum, and he could afford himself comfortable rooms, and was not compelled to be incessantly seeking for employment. Since the rupture

of his engagement with M. de Saint Senier, he had taken no other employment, nor had he sought for any work. Idleness did not make time hang heavy on his hands, though it was a new thing for him to be doing nothing, for since he had quitted the Central College he had never taken a rest. He had first been employed in some extensive smelting works, then in forming a harbour, and lastly by a very large railway company ; he had already done much good work, and had a bright future before him. He could easily have at once found a situation far more safe and lucrative than the creation of the artesian wells on the property of M. de Saint Senier, but he had not attempted to do so.

This renunciation of professional business, dated from the day upon which he had met the Countess at her father's house. He had loved her passionately before her marriage, and though he had lost sight of her for several years, which he had passed far from Paris, he had never forgotten her. His love which had never really been stamped out, had sprung up again at the Marchioness de Muire's ball, and the next day's interview had completed the work. He had only lived for Valentine since he knew that she was unhappy. But he remained faithful to the promise he had made as she got into her carriage at the door of her father's house, and he held himself in readiness to come to her aid should she summon him. He would have been only too happy if she had accepted him as her ally. He did not however deprive himself of the pleasure of gazing at her from afar off, and he walked much oftener than he would have confessed in the neighbourhood of her residence, and he had had cause to repent of this imprudence. One of his sorrows was that he saw no more of M. Vacheron. He had not dared to go back there any more after the discussion between father and daughter, at which he had been present, and he had hoped that the ex-contractor would pay him a visit. But M. Vacheron did nothing of the kind, though he had no reasons to be angry with Henri since chance had done everything. But the good man was rather obstinate, and when he had once got an idea into his head, it was very difficult to get it out again. Trévières had ended by saying to himself that it was his place to yield, and he determined to go to the Rue de la Neva, as soon as his wound would permit him to leave the house. He was already convalescent, and had only kept his bed four days, for he had been attended by an excellent surgeon, and nursed by two of his schoolmates, who had been his seconds in the duel with M. de Sartilly. The day after the races the weather was magnificent, and he sat in his balcony with his arm in a sling. The trees in the Parc

Monceaux were covered with new leaves, the lawns were fresh and green, and joyous children sported in the paths. Trévières gazed upon this pleasant picture, and thought on another garden where a broken-hearted woman was wandering about alone. The garden was that of the Count de Sartilly ; it served as a prison for his wife, but the woman was she whom Henri so passionately adored. His idea was to enter it, but he felt that this would be impossible without injuring the reputation of the Countess.

After some time he noticed a man who was standing on the pavement with his back to the park railing gazing steadily upwards, he got up to see him better, and as he did so the man began to make signs to him with a heavy stick upon which he had been leaning. Trévières at once recognised M. Vacheron, and made a signal to him to come up. It was his place to have gone down, but his wound was his excuse, and he did not yet feel himself strong enough to venture into the street. M. Vacheron did not wait for a second invitation, he crossed the road, and deliberately came into the house. Trévières had only one servant to do all his work, even the little cooking that he required, and this solitary domestic had gone out, he therefore went himself to open the door, and he was surprised to find that his visitor had already reached the third story, he must have had good legs, as he had run up the stairs four at a time.

"Do not hurry yourself," said Henri.

"Don't be afraid, I have excellent wind," returned M. Vacheron, "and since you would not spare me half the journey, I will come up the whole way."

This was no idle boast, for a minute after he arrived on the landing where his young friend was waiting for him, and addressed him thus, "Ah, thou may'st well say that thou have kept me in a temper for the last two months. What dost thou mean by this conduct? Thou livest a few yards from me, and yet thou hast never set thy feet inside my door. The gentleman is sulky," said I. "The gentleman has grown too fine to put himself out. This is what comes of going to balls at Marquises'! at present thou behavest like my son-in-law."

"Pardon me, my dear sir," stammered Henri. "I will explain all to you."

"Begin by letting me come in then. I am strong enough, but I should like to sit down a little."

Trévières ushered him into his sitting-room, the windows of which looked upon the Boulevard de Courcelles, and after Vacheron had settled himself in a comfortable armchair he began again. "I should have never closed my door on thee,

but I had sworn to wait until it pleased thee to make some sign, and had I not perceived thee perched on thy balcony, we should perhaps have never met again. Besides I should never have come up, had I not seen thine arm in a sling. What hast thou done with thine arm? Hast thou had an attack of rheumatism?

"No, I am hurt."

"Good, thou hast fallen off a ladder, and broken a paw, but no, thou dost not work any more now. One of your friends told me so. Then thou hast not been maimed by an accident."

"I shall not be laid up long, for my wound is nearly healed."

"Thy wound, thy wound! Why thou talkest as if thou hadst been fighting a duel?"

"Such a thing may happen to anyone," said Trévières smiling.

"Then I have guessed right, thou hast fought, and now thou art entirely fit for society. I have never fought except with my fists, and then only when I was an apprentice. But what was the cause of this duel?"

"A quarrel."

"Of course, but with whom."

"With some one who insulted me."

"It was about a woman?"

Trévières remained silent. He disdained to lie, and yet he could not tell the father that he had fought for his daughter, when he knew it himself. "Ah, thou wilt not answer me. We will not talk of it any more. After all thy affairs only regard thyself, and I have enough of my own. Ah, my boy, since that day that thou camest to breakfast, the life I lead has been a sad one. I suppose if I told thee that I had entirely broken with my son-in-law, thou wouldst not be much surprised."

"I already knew that you were on bad terms with M. de Sartilly."

"That, I did not care a bit for, but what cuts me to the heart is, that Valentine has sided with her husband."

"I hope that she has not ceased to see you."

"Not altogether, although her husband has forbidden her to do so, I do not go to her, and she does not come to me. We meet in the Monceaux Parc, and even then she by so doing runs the chance of being maltreated by him."

"Maltreated!" repeated Trévières.

"He has not yet got to striking her, but he leads her a terrible life. What dost thou say to that, Henri?"

"Why does he do so, what reason does he allege?"

"What reason? Why, because I refused to lend him money, of course. He avenges himself on her. I am sure that she does not tell me half what she suffers, and I often ask myself if I ought not to go up, and strike the scoundrel. Ah! the law ought to be altered, a father should have the right to sue for the divorce of his daughter. Valentine will not listen to suing for a divorce, nor even for a judicial separation. But I know that I shall end by interfering, and even if I take her away by force, I will remove her to my house, where she will be safe from the violence of the Count de Sartilly. We shall then see if he dare attempt to take her back."

"Can I do nothing to help you in defending her?"

"Yes, I know that thou art devoted to her, and I suspect that thou hast not forgotten that thou proposed to her, and would have married her, had she not been madly in love with this well-dressed puppy, but it is just for the reason that thou hast been in love with her, that thou canst not mix thyself up in her affairs; but for all that I can consult thee as to what should be done, so that I may take some decisive step, and for this reason Valentine wrote to me yesterday, that she had something new to tell me, and that she would meet me to-day, Monday, in the Parc Monceaux, near the water. I have waited for her two hours, and she has not yet made her appearance, which has caused me much uneasiness."

"One of my friends who came to see me, told me that she was at the Longchamps races yesterday."

"Then she is not ill, and that is the more reason for being uneasy."

"But it appears to me, that you can insist on seeing her," exclaimed Trévières.

"Decidedly," responded Vacheron, brandishing his cane, as though to threaten the absent Sartilly. "If he ventured to touch a hair of my child's head, I would break his bones with this stick that I carry. But Valentine begged me not to come. I do not wish to vex her, and know not what to do."

"Doubtless she will write to you."

"How do I know that she will. This fellow may perhaps have hidden her away. I ought to-day to have been with my broker regarding a most important sale. Everything is going down, and a delay of twenty-four hours may perhaps cost me four hundred thousand francs; but I do not think of this, and if in two days from to-day, I do not hear of my daughter, I will go and report the conduct of my son-in-law to the Commissary of police."

"That I think would be unwise."

"Tell me what to do then?"

"Why not write to Mme. de Sartilly? You could send your letter by your servant, and he could bring back an answer."

"It would never reach her; be sure that the Count has given orders to his people, and that she is carefully watched."

"She can get out, however, since you meet her in the Parc Monceaux."

"Certainly; but I have an idea that she is followed wherever she goes. They put spies on her, and watch her. Everyone is against her in that house which has cost me millions, and which I have only built to shelter that villain and his hangers on. Valentine had a maid who was devoted to her, but Sartilly dismissed her, and she has now nothing but enemies about her. I tell you again, my boy, that I have come to the end of my patience. I want my daughter, and if my son-in-law will not give her back to me, I shall end by doing him an injury."

"He would perhaps do so, if you gave him the money that he asked for," suggested Trévieres timidly.

"I will give him double, if I was sure that he would renounce Valentine for ever. But how could I compel him to keep any agreement that he might enter into. The law does not recognise such arrangements. Until this unhappy marriage shall have been legally dissolved, my daughter will remain in the house of her husband; and she will not aid me to break it. Listen, and tell me if what I am going to tell thee, is not abominable—? There are times when I wish she had a lover, that it might give cause for a divorce."

Trévieres trembled at these words. "The faithlessness of a husband is also grounds for a divorce," murmured he. "And I do not doubt for a moment, but that Sartilly has frequently deceived his wife. But how to prove it, and who will sue? The only one to do it is the husband of one of his mistresses; for Valentine refuses to do so. He has been unfaithful to her, I believe, in her own house. She had a companion, a very handsome girl——"

"Mlle. de Ganges, her former schoolmate?"

"Yes. Well, this companion left the house suddenly two months ago, to live with a lover. My old servant saw her yesterday drive past in a fine carriage. Sartilly paid her a great deal of attention, and I am certain that he is keeping her. Unfortunately she is not a married woman, and she will not give up the name of her lover."

"Have you told this to Mme. de Sartilly?"

"Ten times, but she declares that it is not true. She even goes so far as to defend her friend Diana, who resembles her

so little, and declares that she has been calumniated. A creature, who might have lived decently since she had some money of her own, but who prefers to sell herself, so as to ride about in her carriage. These are the style of friends one picks up in a school. Ah! had my wife but lived, Valentine would never have left us, and she would have prevented her from marrying this titled thief; but I had not the proper influence to oppose this unhappy marriage. I was nothing but a poor old man, and I knew nothing of the world which my daughter was going into. I thought that there were nothing but honest people in it, and Valentine gave me all sorts of good reasons, to which I could make no opposition. Ah! I bite my fingers now, when I think that I did not bring her up to work for her living, for then she would not be a Countess, but plain Mme. Trévières, and a happy woman."

A ring at the bell interrupted the lamentations of the ex-contractor. "Some one has come to see thee, I am off," said he commencing to get up.

"Pray remain, I beg of you," answered Trévières. "I do not expect anyone, and whoever it is I will not let them in, only I must go to the door myself, because my servant is out. I shall only be a moment."

M. Vacheron remained seated, and the engineer hurried to the door to see who had rung. He found Lisa whom he had never seen, and did not know, as she had only entered Mme. Sartilly's service after the marriage, and Trévières was not a visitor at the house.

"Monsieur," said she bluntly, "I was formerly in the service of Mme. de Sartilly, and I come from her, or nearly so."

"And does she send you to me," exclaimed the young man, filled with joy and surprise.

"You are M. Henri Trévières?"

"Yes—yes."

"I knew I should find you at home, but I much feared that you might not have recovered from your sword thrust."

"It is nearly healed. Mme. de Sartilly then knows that I have been wounded?"

"Of course; before I came here, I went to M. Vacheron's, but he was out."

"He is here."

"I am very glad to hear it. May I see him?"

"Willingly, but is it with he or I that you have business?"

"With both of you. I received orders to go first to him, and then to you on the same matter."

"Come in then," said Trévières, drawing back to allow Lisa to enter the room. She was coquettishly attired in a dress that the Countess had only worn once or twice, and a very stylish hat, so that Vacheron at first took her for one of Trévières' flames. He was about to get up and go out very much disgusted with his young friend's behaviour, when he gave a second glance at the maid, and recognised her at once. "What, is it thou?" cried he.

"Yes, sir, and very pleased to have met you at last."

"There is reason in the proverb, 'When one speaks of the devil,' etc. We were speaking of thee just now. But what dost thou want with me? Dost thou come from my daughter?"

"No, sir, I have not seen the Countess to-day, I come from Mlle. de Ganges."

"That jade."

"It is true that she was wrong to do as she has done, but my mistress has forgiven her, and she is the only friend who has remained faithful to her in her misfortunes."

"Then my daughter is unhappy!" cried the old man.

"Why did she not come to-day to the Parc Monceaux?"

"Probably because the Count has locked her up."

"Locked her up. Ah! we will see to that. I will have a word or two to say to this Count, and Valentine shall not remain with him for twenty-four hours longer. I shall be at the Avenue d'Eylau in ten minutes, and if his flunkys try to prevent my going in, I will smash them."

Daddy Vacheron had sprung to his feet, had rammed his broad brimmed hat over his eyes, and executed a threatening flourish with his heavy cane.

"Be calm, I beg of you," said Trévières, "and let the girl tell us what has happened."

Lisa was willing and ready. "Yesterday at the races Monsieur quarrelled with Madame, after having left her alone in the carriage the whole day; he was busily engaged in betting, and he lost a big sum of money."

"And it is on Valentine that he takes it out, the confounded rogue!"

"If he had only lost money, it would not have been so bad, but he proposed to Mlle. de Ganges to come and live with him. I need not say that she would have nothing to do with him. She hates him; besides, she has a lover whom she adores. But she wanted to see how far the Count would go, and at last he offered to marry her."

"How marry her?"

"He told her that one day he would be a widower, and it was this speech that frightened Mademoiselle so much."

"Ah, the villain, he is going to murder my daughter."

"He took her away before the end of the races, and as they were going off you should have seen the way in which he looked at her. Mademoiselle has not slept all night for thinking of it, and had she dared she would have come to you herself. But she was afraid of not being well received, and so sent me in her place."

"Sent you where?"

"To your house, sir, to tell you that it was time for you to take action, and she sent me also to M. Trévières."

"Why to Trévières?"

"Well—well—because Monsieur is your friend, and because he is greatly attached to the Countess."

"How do you know that?" asked Valentine's father, frowning.

"Why, if you want plain proof, because he fought for her a day or two back."

"What!" exclaimed Vacheron, looking steadily at Trévières, "then this duel in which you were wounded——"

"M. de Sartilly picked a quarrel with me," answered the young man with a blush.

"And you said nothing to me about it?"

"I did not wish anyone to know anything about the matter. I did not seek the quarrel myself. There was fortunately no talk about it, and I am deeply grieved that it has come to the knowledge of ——"

"Of Mlle. de Ganges," interrupted Lisa. "Mademoiselle only speaks of the matter to her lover and myself. She gained her information by the merest chance. She was walking in the direction of the Auteuil racecourse when she met Mme. de Sartilly, who had heard that her husband was about to fight a duel, and was looking for him. This was their first meeting since Mlle. de Ganges had left the house, and they found M. de Sartilly in rear of the Stand, where the duel had taken place. It was just over before they reached the spot. They saw M. Trévières some distance off, as he was getting into his carriage, but did not recognise him, and afterwards they heard the Count talking about one of his seconds, and telling him that you had told some story about the Countess."

"He lied," returned Henri quickly, less to correct the waiting-maid's tale, than to free himself from the imputation of having acted in such a manner, in the eyes of M. Vacheron.

"Well, but how did all this come about?" asked the old man angrily.

"This is exactly what happened. It is my custom to ride every morning from eight to ten, and to reach the Bois de

Boulogne I sometimes go through the Avenue d'Eylau. Some eight days ago I went this way. I had just turned down the Rue Villejust, and there, I confess, I was wrong in doing it, I paused for a moment to look through the gate of the Countess's house. Whilst I was doing so, M. de Sartilly rode up, followed by a groom, and in the most insolent manner asked me what I was doing there. I do not exactly know what reply I made, but I am sure that I was courteous, for I especially desired to avoid a quarrel with him, which might have compromised your daughter, but he was evidently anxiously to bring one about. He in the most brutal manner ordered me to leave the place, and I, losing my temper, answered him sharply, upon which he informed me that his seconds should wait upon me the next day."

"And they came, I suppose," muttered M. Vacheron between his teeth, for he was hardly able to restrain his anger.

"Yes, sir, and I was not much surprised to find that one of them was M. de Saint Senier, who six weeks ago had made proposals to me to undertake some engineering works."

"Yes, he is his confederate on the turf. They have gone shares in a racing stable, but deuce take me if I know where Sartilly has got the money to do it from. At any rate, he has not got a rap from me."

"Matters having reached such a pitch I could not draw back."

"No, certainly not, but thou shouldst have killed him," said the ex-contractor passionately.

"I did not try to spare him, and I nearly touched him twice, but after lungeing I came to my guard again a second too late, and——"

"Don't talk to me about thy guards. This man is no better than a mad dog, and you kill such beasts whenever you come across them. It is not with either sword or pistol that I will fight with him, if he refuses to give me back my daughter."

"Take care, sir, respectable people do not resort to violent measures."

"They are the only means by which you can deal with scoundrels. I know the best course to take, but thou must not mix thyself up in it for many reasons."

"M. Vacheron is right," said Lisa, "he is the only person who has the right to interfere in order to protect Mme. de Sartilly. You and I, M. Trévières, would spoil everything."

"I am afraid so."

"And besides that I don't want anyone's assistance," replied Vacheron; "but dost thou know what thou ought to do, Henri?"

"I will do whatever you wish."

"Art thou able to go out in a carriage?"

"Certainly. The doctor said I could go out in three days, and two days earlier will not make much difference."

"No, that won't kill thee. Well, then listen, this girl has rendered us a great service by warning us, and she may be useful to us in the future."

"She is only too anxious to be of service to you," broke in Lisa.

"Where does she live?"

"At the Villa des Primevères with her lover."

"Who is he?"

"A young gentleman of very good position, who at once espoused Madame's cause. He hates the Count and M. and Madame de Saint Senier."

"Then, my dear Henri, there is nothing to prevent thy seeing this Mlle. de Ganges."

"I have been in her service since yesterday," said Lisa, "I am living at the villa, and am ready to take M. Trévières there at once."

"I am quite ready to go," said the engineer, "only I am entirely unacquainted with the lady——"

"She knows you by repute, sir, and will be very glad to see you."

"Tell her," continued Vacheron, "that I thank her warmly; before I was ready to curse her, but now I would gladly receive her in my house. She is living with her lover, well, he shall marry her, and she will perhaps live more happily with him than my Valentine has done with that scoundrelly son-in-law of mine."

"I will go at once, but what are you going to do?"

"I am going to walk to the Avenue d'Eylau. I shall arrive quicker that way, for cabs are awfully slow; besides I do not wish the servants to see me drive up. I can open the gate quietly, and I will answer for it that I will see my daughter."

"To see her is not everything," hinted the maid. "The object is to get her away from them."

"I intend to try. Come round to my house this evening, Henri; perhaps thou mayest find her there. As for thee, Lisa, thou knowest what to do, and thou shalt be handsomely recompensed for the service that thou hast done us."

"Oh, sir, my motives were not interested ones."

"Good, but that will not prevent my giving thee a good dowry when thou get'st married."

"Thank you, sir, but I am in no hurry."

"Well, I am, so I am off. Go and get a carriage for M. Trévières. By the time that thou hast found one I shall

be at the other end of the Parc Monceaux. I shall see thee again this evening, Henri," and without waiting any longer M. Vacheron left the room, and descended the staircase with all the fire and energy of a young man.

A few moments afterwards he passed through the park gate, and hurried along the pathway. The ex-contractor, who was about to give battle to the Count de Sartilly, had been cast in a hardy mould ; he had a will of iron, and if he was slow to come to a decision, when he had done so, he carried it out with energy and perseverance. This firmness of disposition had been one of the greatest auxiliaries to him in making his fortune. He was as patient as a peasant, to which class he had belonged, for he had been born in Auvergne ; he had submitted to all the indignities which his worthless son-in-law had heaped upon his head, until he learned that not content with plundering him, he had gone so far as to threaten the life of his wife ; and now Vacheron would have slain him to rescue his daughter from his hands. The lamb had turned into a lion. The worthy citizens seated on the benches in the park, as they watched this kindly-featured old man walk hurriedly past them, thought that he was one of themselves, and that he was simply endeavouring by rapid exercise to check a natural tendency to corpulency, and did not for a moment guess that he was hurrying so fast to his destination in order to deal out justice to the persecutor of his daughter. After having passed through the park he continued his rapid course along the Avenue Hoche, which leads to the Place de l'Etoile, passed under the Arch of Triumph, and never deviating from the straight line, at last found himself in the Avenue d'Eylau. He was advancing valiantly to the fight, but in fact he had no definite plan, and as he drew near the house he relaxed his pace a little in order to settle his course of action. If he could see Valentine alone nothing would be easier than to explain everything to her, and he relied upon his pleadings as her father to induce her to accompany him ; but if Gontran was at home, the position would assume a more complicated form ; in that case he must play a bold game, and tell his son-in-law plainly that he would appeal to the law to remove Mme. de Sartilly from a house where she ran the risk of being murdered by her husband. The success, however, of such a proceeding would be very doubtful, as there was much lack of direct evidence, and anxious as Vacheron was to finish once and for all with his son-in-law, he could not help secretly hoping that he might not meet him.

"Will he be in, or will he be out?" asked the old man to himself, and each time he answered, "He will not be in."

Vacheron was full of confidence in his luck, but he had not foreseen the third alternative which speedily presented itself to him.

He found the gate leading into the Avenue d'Eylau open, and he walked rapidly up to the house without paying any attention to the cries of the porter who came out of the lodge, no doubt taking him for one of the tradespeople, and shouted, "What do you want?"

Vacheron did not attempt to stop, and the porter not caring to run after him, rang a bell as a signal to those in the house that an unknown visitor was approaching. Vacheron found an imposing-looking footman standing on the steps, having just opened the glazed door that led into the hall, and who, looking down upon him with a rather contemptuous air, enquired, "Who do you wish to see?"

"I wish to see my daughter," answered the old man, calmly.

CHAPTER XVII

'TWIXT HUSBAND AND FATHER

THE footman looked at him more contemptuously than ever. "We have got no daughter of yours here, my good man. You have come to the wrong house."

"My daughter, Mme. de Sartilly," said Vacheron, taking a step forward as though to enter the house.

"Halloa! a madman!" cried the footman.

"I tell you that I am Mme. de Sartilly's father."

"And I tell you that you shall not come in, and if you give me any more of your nonsense I will call a policeman."

"Aha, you take it that way, do you; well, we will see."

The man was tall and strong, but the ex-contractor was all muscle; he grasped the man by the shoulder and twisted him violently round, and giving him a punch in the back, sent him reeling against the wall.

"Help! police!" cried the fellow.

Vacheron let him shout; he knew the way to his daughter's room, and he was making his way straight there when he heard a woman's voice asking, "What is the matter? What is all this noise about?"

"It is this old buffer who insists on seeing Madame."

Vacheron, in a great rage, was turning round to give the fellow who spoke thus a sound thrashing, when he all at once found himself face to face with a woman who had entered the hall through a door leading into the garden. She was a

middle-aged woman, and looked something like a house-keeper, but the old man took an instinctive dislike to her at once. She was not ugly, and when younger she had no doubt been very pretty, but there were the traces of every vice imprinted on her features, and her eyes gleamed with malicious light. She had what is termed a regular Old Bailey cast of countenance.

"Who are you, sir?" asked she.

"My name is Peter Vacheron," answered the worthy man looking her full in the face, "and this, do you understand, is my house."

"This is the Count de Sartilly's house."

"Not at all; the house belongs to my daughter."

The woman's countenance fell. No doubt she was better informed than the footman, and knew how matters stood.

"Pardon me, sir," said she. "I have only been a short time in Madame's service, and——"

"Oh! you are the new maid, are you. Well, I don't want you; I know the way, so just be off, and that as sharp as you like."

"Pardon me, sir, but my mistress is not at home."

"I don't believe a word of it; but if she is out, I will go and sit in the little drawing-room until she comes in."

"You cannot go upstairs, sir."

"Why not, pray?"

"Because the Count has forbidden any visitor to be admitted during the absence of the Countess."

"Well, you can tell him that I compelled you to disobey his orders, and if he doesn't like it he can come to me about it."

"The Count is out."

"Like the Countess. Well, it seems there are nothing but servants here, if I am to believe you. So I shall take the place of your master, and until they come back I shall go to my daughter's room."

"If you do that, sir, I shall lose my place."

"Well, I hope so, I am sure. What is your name?"

"Florence, sir, and let me tell that you no one has ever treated me as you have done before."

"There must be a beginning to everything; and now be off, for I have seen enough of you."

"I cannot prevent you from going upstairs, sir, but I shall go up with you."

"By heavens, this is too much," shouted M. Vacheron. "We will soon see who is master here. If you venture to follow me up, I will throw you over the banisters."

The footman now prepared to come forward to the assistance of Florence, and the scene, which had hitherto been a comic one, might have had a tragic termination, when the door leading into the garden opened once more, and Mme. de Sartilly appeared on the threshold. Directly she perceived her father she rushed up to him, and threw herself into his arms.

"Well, you old fagot, here is my daughter. You will prevent my seeing her, will you? Why did you lie to me, and say that she was out?"

"I was not aware that my mistress had come in," said the woman insolently.

"You had better say at once that your master had constituted you her gaoler. And now you may get out. I dismiss you."

"I take no orders from you," growled Florence, who did not feel herself strong enough to contend with M. Vacheron, and therefore prepared to beat a retreat until she was reinforced.

"Come, father, come with me," pleaded Valentine, attempting to lead the old man away. He understood that he had been in the wrong, and remembered that he had not come to wrangle with his son-in-law's servants.

"Good," muttered he between his teeth. "Take me to your room. If that jade ventures to show her face there, I will give her something for herself." With these words he commenced ascending the staircase, whilst Florence went off muttering loud enough to be heard by Valentine, "We shall see what the Count will say to all this."

The footman was a mere subaltern agent, and did not move, but his opinion coincided with that of the maid.

The Countess led her father into the little room in which she passed nearly all her time, for she seldom even went into the garden, and sank into an arm-chair.

"How changed you are," exclaimed her father, who up to this time had not examined her attentively.

He spoke the truth. She had grown very thin, her cheeks were hollow, and her eyes sparkled with fever; her father could see that her hands trembled as they lay in her lap. Vacheron took them in his, and sat down by her side, and said quietly, "Thou canst not hide thy sufferings from me any longer; I see them too plainly."

"I am not ill," murmured she.

"Be quiet, this man is killing thee by degrees. Things cannot go on like this any longer."

"Father, I assure you that you are mistaken."

"Why, my poor child, hast thou the face to repeat this to

me again ; why, thou art not even a free woman, and hadst thou been at liberty thou wouldst have come and met me yesterday at the Parc Monceaux. I waited for thee for nearly two hours, and out of mere anger I went up to see Henri, who lives just opposite, and there I heard fine things about thee, and thy husband."

"Did you call on M. Trévières," exclaimed Valentine, who trembled as her father mentioned the name of the young engineer.

"Yes, and I found him with his arm in a sling. He has been fighting with thy husband, and thou knowest it."

"Yes, I know it."

"But dost thou know why he fought with him ?

"Gontran told me ——"

"Yes, he tells thee what he likes : but this is the real truth. Trévières was riding through the Rue Villejust, and had stopped for a moment to look at thy house. Thy husband came up and brutally ordered him to move on, and insulted him in the grossest manner. And dost thou dare to tell me that thou art not the prisoner of this man ? Has he the right to prevent people from stopping to look at the fine house which thou broughtest to him ? Does he think for a moment that he has gone back to the old feudal times, when the peasants were not allowed to go near his house. Yes, yes, these grand noblemen used to shut up their wives, and Sartilly follows the customs of his ancestors. Thou art watched ; any step of thine is spied upon. Lisa, thy former maid, told me all ——"

"What, have you seen her then. Why, I was expecting her yesterday. She had promised to come, and yet she disappointed me !"

"She has taken a situation with the companion who ran away from thee, and it is that girl who has sent her to me, to tell me that I had no time to lose if I wanted to save thee from the clutches of this man ; and therefore, my child, do not tell me any fibs, do not invent anything to justify thy husband's conduct, but tell me the whole truth. Tell me the whole truth."

Valentine could not reply : she burst into tears, and hid her face in her hands.

"Thou weepest, my child ; confess, then, that thou art unhappy."

"Most unhappy," sobbed the Countess, "he loves me no more."

"And he has never loved thee," answered her father, coarsely. "He married thee for thy money. He has played a nice game with thee, and he would have gone on playing it

had he hoped to get any more out of thee. But I swear to thee that he shall not get a single sou. Therefore, thou mayst expect any vile treatment at his hands, for he is a scoundrel, and I feel that I should be wanting in a father's duty if I left thee at his mercy, and this is the reason that I have come to ask thee to come with me to-day."

"To come with you!" repeated Valentine in tones of terror and amazement.

"Certainly, and I am going to take thee home with me. To-night thou shalt sleep in thine own room, where thou used to be before thou wert married; and I can assure thee, that thou wilt find it as thou leftest it before thine accursed marriage."

"But to leave my home, my husband? Why, do you not know that he accuses me of having a lover, and that he has the right of taking me back again by legal means?"

"I will prevent his doing so, trust to me. Thou wilt be at thy father's house, and I will obtain an injunction from the President of the Court, authorising thee to remain there, whilst thou art filing thy petition for a divorce; a petition which I tell thee thou wilt gain a verdict on. Thou hast sufficient grievances to put forward: the reckless extravagance of M. de Sartilly, the scandalous life that he leads. He gambles in a manner sufficient to ruin anyone, he has mistresses —"

"Mistresses, who has told you that?"

"I am certain of it. Look you, yesterday, at the races, whilst thou wast sitting all alone in thy carriage, he went to that Mlle. de Ganges, who, after all, is better than I thought her. She sent to tell me of him; he offered her an establishment, and then, when she sent him about his business, he offered to marry her, when he was free."

"If I could only believe it."

"Thou wilt believe it quick enough when thy late companion tells thee all about it, and thou wilt know it shortly, for I have sent a message by Trévières to her, to let her know how pleased I shall be to see her. They say that she is living with her lover. What do I care. I shall be glad to see him, for he is worth much more than thy husband, and I hope that I shall perhaps be able to persuade him to marry her, and then thou shalt marry that good fellow Trévières, whom thou knowest I am so fond of."

"I shall never marry anyone again," answered Valentine.

"Thou canst do as thou likest about that as long as thou wilt dissolve thy marriage with the Count de Sartilly; and now since thou commencest to put faith in my words, and to believe that he is the man he is, do not waste any time in

reflection. When once thou hast taken a good step, do not hesitate for a moment in carrying it out. Dress thyself, and let us go."

"Will you swear to me that Gontran asked Diana to be his mistress?"

"Yes, and he offered to marry her as soon as he should have got rid of thee. If thou doubtest it, thou hast but to confront him with Mlle. de Ganges; but come, thou hast now to return home with me. Mind, I distrust thee. This man has cast a spell over thee. He rules thee absolutely, and if he could only see thee alone for ten minutes, thou wouldst alter thy opinion. Come with me, I say."

Valentine was ready to go with him, for he had wounded her to the quick in telling her of the infamous proposals that the Count de Sartilly had made to Diana de Ganges. She had been able to endure harshness, contempt, and desertion, but infidelity was more than she could put up with. Diana had told her of this whilst she was at Auteuil searching for the spot where the duel was to take place, but at that moment she was hardly in a state to listen to her friend making charges against her husband, when he might be standing sword in hand before an adversary.

But she could not help putting confidence in her father, because she remembered what had taken place at the last Longchamps races. Her husband had placed her carriage at the extreme end of the line, and had abandoned her during the whole day, only making his appearance to take her away, and during the time occupied by their return home, overwhelming her with a flood of bitterly sarcastic remarks. At last she understood that her father was in the right, and that unless she cast aside all her dignity as a woman, she could no longer remain in her husband's house, where she was treated with less consideration than a servant.

"Be quick," said M. Vacheron, "the jade, that I had so much trouble in getting rid of, is quite capable of going and fetching Sartilly, and I half imagine that he is not far off."

The ex-contractor did not know how near he was to the truth. The Count had just returned home, and had met on the staircase Florence, whom he used as a spy and a gaoler. She at once told him the position of affairs, and he did not hesitate for a moment as to what course he should pursue. He had long foreseen that this must happen, and he knew at once what to do to checkmate his father-in-law. Just as Valentine was about to go and dress, he threw open the door of the room in which she had been talking with her father.

The old man grew pale with rage, and was about to accost his son-in-law in no measured language, but he was dumb-

founded when M. de Sartilly addressed him in the most courteous manner.

"I did not expect, sir," said he, "to meet you here, but, believe me, I am delighted to see you."

"Indeed," retorted Vacheron, with an angry look. "Well, my feelings are entirely opposite, and had I expected to meet you —"

"You would not have come, and I assure you that I should have deeply regretted it, for I wanted for some time back to have an explanation with you, an explanation, which, believe me, is indispensable, and, my dear Valentine, it is one which I should wish you to hear. Will you, therefore, do me the kindness to remain."

"She won't remain here long," interrupted Vacheron, who was not much mollified by this commencement. "I came here to take her away with me, and it is time that I should do so."

"Valentine is perfectly at liberty to go with you whenever you desire it."

"Why did you prevent my seeing her then?"

"How can you have picked up such an idea? I never ask where she goes, and I have always thought that she went to see you regularly. Certainly, I do not go with her, but it was for the reason that I did not think my visits were agreeable to you —"

"And you were not mistaken. But this is enough useless trash. You make my daughter very unhappy, and I will not let you do so any longer?"

"And you are perfectly right in doing so, but do you never think that I, too, am very unhappy?"

"You, why, are you going to complain? I had never thought of that. You, who have treated her as a mere slave? You, who spend her fortune on your mistresses?"

"Here is a flood of accusations," answered the Count de Sartilly, with a smile. "Will you permit me to answer these *seriatim*."

"Yes, justify yourself if you can. Do you dare to deny that you have my daughter watched, watched by that old witch that you have picked up the Lord knows where?"

"Do you mean Florence? she was for ten years with one of my friends, and I hope that she has never given my dear Valentine any cause of complaint. If I thought that she had done so, I would dismiss her at once. But I was compelled to send the other maid away, because she was behaving in a way that could not be tolerated in any respectable family."

M. Vacheron looked at Valentine, waiting for her to speak,

but she did not say a word. She kept her eyes upon her husband who did not appear in any way moved, and who answered tranquilly: "And now, sir, you accuse me of ruining my wife, but surely you must agree that this would be difficult, as her money is settled on herself."

"Yes, and lucky it is for her, but still that does not prevent your borrowing."

"I have not forgotten what I owe you, sir, and that you last year advanced me some money, which I shall return to you before two months are over——"

"I can do without it, and I never calculated on your paying me again; it was to my daughter that I gave this money, but for all that, if you are ready to pay, you may do so. It is not very long since you sent Valentine to me to borrow the double of those one hundred and fifty thousand francs, which you had lost at the gambling table, or in betting, which are after all the same thing."

"Because I wished to join a really business-like undertaking, and at that moment I had not funds at my disposal. But I have since been able to procure them, and I hope very shortly to realise a handsome dividend."

"All the better for you, for it will enable you to go about with your women, but I don't think your wife will take much pleasure in your successful operations. Ask her what she thinks," said the old man looking earnestly at his daughter.

Again Valentine remained silent. She did not seem much inclined to support her father.

"Will you tell me, sir," said Gontran, with an ironical sneer, "who the ladies are, whose expenses I am in the habit of defraying?"

"Do you think I am acquainted with such cattle as that? But I can tell you the name of a young woman whom you made overtures to yesterday."

"Ah, now I understand what you are driving at! you are speaking of my wife's late companion. Yes, I chanced to see her yesterday at Longchamps, and she had the impertinence to call me to her, and I was foolish enough to talk with her for a few moments, for I was seized with a certain amount of curiosity. This young lady disappeared one fine night, and I did not positively know what had become of her. For a time I was, I confess, a little doubtful, but I was soon placed in a position of certainty, for when her lover came up, she had the audacity to introduce me to him."

"She says something more than that."

"I am not at all surprised that she has dressed up the story according to her own fancy. My interview did not last five minutes, and I am astonished, sir, that you have put

any faith in Mlle. de Ganges' statements—a woman of good birth, and who might have maintained a good position in society, but who has with the most complete audacity plunged headlong into a course of vice. The manner in which she has spoken to you, and to others, is the natural result of her own inexcusable conduct. She has attacked me, to ward off attacks upon herself. She is playing her own game, and I have no wish to interfere in it ; but should my wife believe in the calumnies that this lost woman sets about concerning me, I shall be deeply grieved."

"No, no, I do not believe them," murmured Valentine.

"What," said M. Vacheron, "*you* support your husband ! *You*, who just now ——"

"Pardon me, sir," broke in the Count, "but my wife has had reasons—indeed, she has a right to complain of me."

"Ah, you confess it then ?"

"Certainly I do, but still I have a right to endeavour to justify myself before her, and it is for that reason that I have joined you here, only perhaps with her I should not have pleaded my cause as I now intend to do. You are Valentine's father and can be my judge. Certainly she has grave cause of complaint against me. I know that I have kept away from her, that I have sometimes spoken harshly to her, that I have put on an air of disdain, and indifference ; and my excuse is—I have but one, that I have been madly jealous of her, and am so still."

"Do you venture to assert that my daughter has given you any cause for jealousy ?"

"Will you listen to me to the end ? You shall give judgment after you have heard what I have to say, and I hope that my wife will understand me. My jealousy dates from some time back, and it has induced me to commit more than one fault as I allow, more especially one of a recent date, which I expect my wife to pardon me. She knows to what I refer." He evidently alluded to the nocturnal visit of George Cézambre, and Sartilly knew well the impression he would make on his wife by recalling this to her memory. It was as though he had openly said to Valentine "I am sure that that man was not your lover, and I was wrong to accuse you as I did." She was but too well disposed to pardon him, and Gontran like a skilful strategist was rapidly bringing her over to his side, as he continued speaking with an affectation of deep emotion : "Permit me to remind you, sir, that you were desirous of your daughter's contracting another alliance, and it was not your fault that she did not marry M. Trévières."

"And she would have been a thousand times happier had she done so," muttered Vacheron.

"That is a question for her to decide," replied Sartilly, with a smile. "Let me conclude my confession. I had no fear of this rival, but as you can imagine, I did not like him. However I had almost forgotten him until one night last winter I met him at a ball given by the Marchioness de Muire, and Valentine danced frequently with him—ah, now that I reflect calmly I can see that she could not help treating her father's friend courteously, but then I was seized with a furious fit of jealousy, which however quickly passed away. Valentine can remember it, and this was followed by several others. I concealed them from my wife, and I have now told her that I hated this man Trévières with a deadly hatred ; but for all that, she has been the victim of my bad temper, but had I not loved her so much, she would never have had reason to complain of me."

"Enough of this," said Vacheron, angrily. "Tell these tales to someone else, Count, for had you loved my daughter you would never have behaved to her as you have. You deserted her, you shut her up, and now you come and tell me that you worship her. Worship her a little less, and make her a little more happy. As for your jealousy, you have had plenty of time to cure yourself of that, for my daughter has proved to you that she has nothing to reproach herself with. You have fought a duel with poor Trévières and wounded him, having fixed a groundless quarrel upon him, and now what more do you want ?"

"Valentine's pardon," answered Sartilly, with emotion.

The Countess made a movement as though she would throw herself into her husband's arms, but her father interposed between them. "First earn that pardon," said he ; "It is not sufficient to say that you repent, you must prove it."

"How can I do so ?"

"First, by granting her perfect liberty, instead of shutting her up here. Let her come and stay with me and I will not prevent you seeing her."

"We should run the chance of meeting your friend M. Trévières."

"And if you did so, you know well enough that he is a worthy good fellow, that Valentine is a virtuous woman, and that I should not suffer anything wrong to take place beneath our roof. I should think that you could manage to pass through a few months of trial. Alter yourself, both in her eyes and mine. Begin by leading a new life. Leave your gambling, betting, and running after other women. Dissolve your partnership with your friend Saint Senier. In a word, if you desire forgiveness, come back to the right road. I do not

treat you with harshness, and Valentine, I fear, is too kind to you. But if you do not change your mode of life, she will sue for a divorce, and obtain it too, Count, for even the world in which you live has not too favourable an opinion of you, and the Court will express the same feeling, as the public has already given.

"Should my wife take such an extreme step, I shall not defend the case."

"In that case it would be because you had something better in view. But even if you like it, we could come to some amicable arrangement on the point of a divorce. We can obtain one much more easily, when both parties are agreed on the subject."

"You have not understood my meaning, sir. I most ardently desire to remain married, for one sole reason, which you well know—I love my wife, and if the calumnies which people spread about prove too much for me, and the judge misled by false statements, decides against me, I shall enter no protest against the justice of the decision, but I shall leave the country, and Valentine will never hear of me again."

She drank in his every word, and gazed on him with eager eyes, in which he could read his pardon, and the unhappy father began to see that he would be worsted in this strife, and would never be able to convince his daughter of her husband's sinister designs. For a moment he thought he had gained the day, but the victory escaped from his hands, for he was no match for a consummate actor and fair speaker, like the Count. He would not however yield at once. "If," resumed he, "you are so much against a divorce, why did you yesterday at the races offer to marry Mlle. de Ganges?"

"If she has made such a statement, she is worse even than I had thought her," answered the Count, without moving a muscle. "The girl lies, and the falsehood is of so gross a nature that no one could be taken in by it. I appeal to Valentine if she believes it?"

"No, I do not believe it," answered Valentine, raising her head proudly.

"Ah!" exclaimed Vacheron, "I came here to save thee and thou desertest me. Between the father who asserts, and the husband who denies, thou decidest in favour of the latter. Dost thou want to drive me to despair?"

Mme. de Sartilly made no reply to this vehement adjuration, and the old man continued passionately: "And to defend thee I overcame the dislike with which thy persecutor inspired me. I braved the insults of his servants, and entered a house in which I had sworn never again to set my

foot; and when I endeavour to draw thee away from his evil influence thou refusest to follow me. All that remains for thee now is to expel thy father from beneath thy roof; but I will spare thee that shame, for I will go away, and thou shalt never see me more."

Valentine had been confused by Gontran's address, but overcome by the emotions that this scene had aroused in her bosom, she was about to throw herself into her father's arms, when by an expressive gesture he arrested her impulse, saying firmly, "No, thou must choose between him or me; to go with me or to remain with him. If thou hesitatest it is because thou art not decided to break this accursed marriage. I cannot compel thee to do so. Thou art rushing headlong to destruction, and one day thou wilt bitterly regret not having listened to me. Then it will be too late, for I will never come back again. I can do nothing for thee, I can only avenge thee, if fatal consequences ensue." With these words, and paying no attention to the entreaties of his daughter, he rushed from the room. Valentine remained motionless, rooted to the spot. M. de Sartilly followed his father-in-law on to the staircase, to make sure that he had really gone. He escorted him with all courtesy to the front door, without taking any notice of the furious aspect of M. Vacheron, who more than once turned round like a wild boar at bay, and muttered curses which his son-in-law affected not to hear.

Gontran, thus left master of the field, at once had an interview with Florence, who re-appeared at the other end of the hall, and gave her some orders, which must have been important ones, for the old harridan put on a grave expression when she heard them, and then, as soon as this rapid colloquy was over, the Count hurried back to his wife to profit by the victory that he had once more gained.

CHAPTER XVIII

A RACING MEPHISTOPHELES

MEANWHILE, the unhappy father, after his signal defeat, walked rapidly along the Avenue d'Eylau, gesticulating violently, and muttering half aloud, projects of vengeance. He was walking along, his eyes bent on the ground, and never heard the sound of a carriage which was coming up rapidly behind him. He had just reached the end of the avenue, when repeated shouts of "Hi! hi!" aroused him from his gloomy meditations. He turned round quickly,

saw a horse's head almost touching him, endeavoured to throw himself on one side, stumbled, and after a vain effort to recover himself, fell at full length on the roadway. Had not the coachman thrown the horses on their haunches, the ex-contractor would have been killed on the spot, but fortunately the carriage stopped in time, and the hoofs of the two bay horses did not strike him, whilst the wheel only grazed him slightly. The fall, however, had been a severe one, and Vacheron would have been unable to gain his feet alone. A crowd at once collected, as it invariably does in a similar case, but no one was prompt in assisting the fallen man. Diana de Ganges and George Cézambre were the occupants of the victoria which had been the cause of the accident. Both sprang out to his aid, and when the old man, dazed and giddy from his fall, returned to consciousness, the first object that met his eyes was the face of his daughter's late companion. He had not met her for a long time, but he had an excellent memory for faces, and besides, at the very moment of the accident, he was thinking of her. The idea of utilising this chance meeting at once occurred to him, and his first action was to release himself from the little crowd that had gathered round him.

"Come, let me get away," said he shaking the dust from his clothes, "you see that I am not hurt; besides the lady and gentleman are friends of mine." The lookers-on slowly dispersed, and Vacheron sank down on a bench by the side of Diana, whilst George stood in front to screen them from the eyes of a few of the more curious amongst the bystanders, who still lingered.

"You are not hurt, I trust, sir?" asked Diana.

"No, no, there is nothing broken, and I am very pleased to see you. I sent to Auteuil —"

"Yes, M. de Trévières—we have just left him, and were going to your house. This gentleman is my friend M. Cézambre."

"I know, Lisa told me —"

"She has remained behind at the villa awaiting our orders. M. Trévières is coming back by the train. You will see him this evening. He told us that you had left him to go to Mme. de Sartilly."

"I have just come from there. I have seen her —"

"Well?"

"She is lost. I had persuaded her to come with me, when her husband entered the room. I reproached him face to face with his conduct, but he denied everything. He was full of fine phrases and sentimental sayings, and swore that he loved her, but that jealousy had nearly driven him mad,"

"He, jealous? Why, a man must have some heart to be jealous."

"Yes, jealous of Trévières. According to his own account it was that which induced him to challenge him. And Valentine listened to it all, and believed in his oaths and his repentance. I endeavoured to take her away with me, but she would not come. I warned her of the fate that awaited her, and she seemed not to understand me. I asked her to choose between her father and her husband, declaring that if she decided against me I would never set foot in her house again—and she permitted me to go away!"

"And she has remained there at the mercy of that villain. You are right, sir: she is lost if those who love her do not come to her aid. It is evident that you cannot intervene further, but I can still act, and I have a plan of my own, for I had foreseen that she would refuse to shake off the yoke of this wretch. He has cast a spell over her, and we must save her in spite of herself."

"What do you intend to do?"

"I will tell you all at your own house. Get into our carriage, the Rue de la Neva is close at hand, we shall be there in five minutes, and then I will lay my plans before you. I know from M. Trévières that you have forgiven me for having acted as I have done, and the fondest hope of my heart is to show my gratitude by restoring your daughter to you. We will have a long talk, and George shall go and wait for me at the Pavillon d' Armenonville where we are going to dine."

This arrangement was at once agreed upon. Vacheron was only too glad to consult with his new ally, who apparently did not yet despair of rescuing Valentine from the clutches of her oppressor, whilst as for George he never resisted a wish that his beloved Diana expressed, and this time the wish was almost a request.

In Paris there are a number of summer dining places which rely upon attracting diners-out in fine weather, and this in a city where it rains nine months out of the twelve. They abound in the Champs Elysées, and in the Bois de Boulogne, without counting those beyond the barrier, and they do a very fair business, for often there is quite a demand for tables. One fine season repays them for four bad ones. And this season the spring had been an early one. Everything was in blossom, the horse-chestnut trees had already began to throw out their coronetted flowers, and the women to put on summer costumes. To enjoy this delightful weather so appreciated by lovers, Diana and George finding themselves obliged to leave the villa for a few hours, had

determined to dine at the Pavilion d'Armenonville, after having seen M. Vacheron. Upon the first words uttered by M. Trévières when he arrived at the villa, under the guidance of Lisa, Mlle. de Ganges had ordered the carriage to be got ready. Valentine's father required her aid, and she did not for a moment hesitate to obey his summons. George had asked to be permitted to accompany her, for he had now enrolled himself as one of Mme. de Sartilly's staunchest defenders. The accident in the Place de l'Etoile had altered the arrangement that Diana had made, and she now thought it best to have a private conference with M. Vacheron. The two lovers therefore separated for a time, and whilst Diana's victoria rolled quickly to the Rue de la Neva, George began to walk in the direction of the Bois de Boulogne. He went on his way leisurely, for it was hardly five o'clock and he was ignorant how long Diana would be engaged with M. Vacheron. He did not know exactly where the restaurant was at which they were to dine, and chancing the direction, he turned down the Avenue de la Grande Armée, until he came to the Porte Maillot. Without knowing it, he had come the shortest way, and he had scarcely entered the Bois, by the Longchamps road, than he saw down a side turning the sign of the Pavilion d'Armenonville. He went in, and engaged a private room on the first floor. The weather was fine enough to have dined in the open air, but the night soon closes in in April; Diana might be detained, and would perhaps not care about being exposed to the chilliness of the evening. George had nothing to do whilst waiting for her, and to pass away the time, he walked round the little lake that lies in front of the building. There were some tables ready laid, on the lawn, but no one had yet taken possession of them, and the proprietor of the establishment was consulting his weather-glass to see if he might depend upon the fine weather to enable him to reap a plentiful harvest that evening.

But George's mind was filled with other thoughts. He thought of his adored Diana, of the unfortunate Valentine, and of the insolent Count de Sartilly, the common enemy of them all, and against whom it was necessary to do battle, and he asked himself how the campaign that they were about to open would finish. His noble disposition had impelled him to enter heart and soul into the fray, but there were moments when he regretted the happy calm of those sweet hours which he had spent in the Villa Primevères two months ago. Now they were going to plunge into war, with all its vicissitudes and disquietudes, and with all its varied chances of defeat or success, for this husband against

whom they were about to fight was well able to defend himself, and would spare no one. The Countess even might range herself against them, for Gontran could do with her what he liked, and might turn her against her old friend, who would not be supported by the opinion of the world, for Gontran in spite of all his social defects still maintained his rank and standing, and could cause much trouble and annoyance to his wife's late companion.

Plunged in these unpleasant reflections, George arrived at the extremity of the lake, and to ponder more at his ease he sat down on a bank close to a clump of trees which almost formed a species of thicket. There were many narrow and winding paths about the grounds formed for the convenience of the visitors to the restaurant, who wandered up and down them before, and after dinner. George were not therefore much surprised to hear at the back of the little shrubbery near which he was seated, two men's voices in close conversation. They were walking to and fro as they conversed, and every now and then they stopped for a few moments, and then resumed their promenade. They came nearer and nearer, and at last sat down, as he could hear from the grating of the legs of the chairs on the gravel, and they were now so close that George could not help hearing their conversation. They were talking English, and George who had been born and brought up in the Mauritius, which has belonged to England since 1815, understood perfectly what they were saying, but he would have paid no attention to their conversation had not the words "*My Lord Count*" struck upon his ear. Certainly this was but a vague clue, for Counts are numerous in Paris, but a man concerning whom George had thought frequently of late, bore this title, and a presentiment crossed his mind that he was mixed up in this matter.

"My dear William Oxwall," said one of the voices.

George recollected to have heard this name before, he could not remember where. "My dear Oxwall," continued the same voice still speaking in grammatical English, but with a slight French accent. "Surely I have put you in the way of gaining enough money for the last five years, for you to give me credit for two months."

"I would willingly do so," returned the other speaker who was evidently an Englishman, "but I am utterly unable to do so. It was yesterday that cleared me out. I dropped twelve thousand pounds on one horse."

"*Parbleu*, I know that, it was on Black Radish—you laid ninety to one against him. What the deuce made you run such a risk?"

"I was regularly humbugged by a false tip, and yet I got it from the stable where he was trained."

"Saint Senier had better information than you, for he backed the horse for a thousand louis; you ought to know that he never bets except on a certainty."

"I hedged at once, but the harm was done, and I made nothing on the other races. All the favourites came in, and a confounded outsider like Black Radish cost me three hundred thousand francs. It is a complete smash up."

"Not more so than mine, for I managed to drop four thousand louis in the same race, in which my partner made ten thousand, but I shall pick myself up in three weeks, for our two-year-old Snowflake will certainly win the Grand Produce Stakes."

"I am convinced of it, my lord, perfectly sure of it, I may say."

"Well, I shall put so much money on him, that I shall square myself at one shot."

"I do not know so much about that, my lord, your horse is so certain to be a winner that I wouldn't lay against him at any price. I don't know what the other bookmakers will do, but I will lay you what you like that neither Saffery nor Wright, who always give the best odds to backers, will take less than four to one against Snowflake, if they do that; so you won't pull yourself through by Snowflake. If you are two hundred and fifty thousand francs to the bad, and that is a mere supposition on my part, for you only owe me eighty thousand, you must, if you want to get square, risk a million, and that is a sum that no bookmaker will lay you, on tick at least."

A silence ensued. George now knew who the speakers were. The name of William Oxwall which had from the first appeared familiar to him, was the name of the bookmaker to whom Saint Senier had introduced him, and the unlucky backer could be no other than the Count de Sartilly, who it now appeared was more hopelessly ruined than even his father-in-law had thought. What a terrible future was looming for the unfortunate Valentine.

The Englishman broke the silence. "You see, Count, that I cannot agree with you in your hopes. Nor can I wait for my money any longer, and that was the reason that I ventured to write to you, to ask you to meet me in this out-of-the-way corner of the Bois, at a time when we were not likely to meet anyone. You will do me the justice to remember that I refrained from calling on you at your house. In a case like this one must be most discreet, and I am so well known everywhere, that were I to be seen entering your house the report would get about that you owed me money, or what would be worse again, that we were confederates."

"Yes, I knew that I could trust you, and therefore I kept the appointment. But we are as yet no further advanced than if I had remained at home. I have told you before, and I repeat it again, that I am utterly cleared out. The racing stable that I started with M. de Saint Senier, has taken away all my available cash. At my clubs I do nothing but lose. I owed you money before, and since yesterday I am in with you deeper still. I had expected to pay you after the Produce Stakes had been run for, but you have shown me that my calculations are based on a wrong point, and that I have been buoying myself up with a vain hope. I suppose that you are right, but what am I to do? If you can't give me time, you can give me advice."

"Advice! You flatter me, Count. I should never venture to offer advice to a gentleman in your position. Only if you ask me, I will tell you that there is perhaps a method by which we can get through our trouble, I say we, because if you can't pay me, I may as well burn my books, and chuck up the whole concern."

"Tell me your idea, and if it is a practicable one, be sure I shan't hesitate for a moment in adopting it."

"It is a moral certainty, but you may not care to go in for it."

"Tell me what it is, at any rate."

"Well, Count, suppose your colt, Snowflake, which is certain to win, should lose?"

"I don't understand you," answered the Count, after a pause.

"Yet it is the simplest thing in the world," continued Oxwall. "Snowflake will start as first favourite, I am certain of that, and so are you. The odds will be at least three to one on him, perhaps they may be four to one, and as he is certain to come in first, the betting will be heavy, all the backers will put their money on your horse."

"As I shall do; I have already backed him for fifteen hundred louis, with Saffery."

"A mere trifle, which will only bring you in ten thousand francs if Snowflake comes in first; but suppose, on the other hand, that he is beaten?"

"I shall certainly lose thirty thousand, and I don't see any advantage to me in that."

"But I shall get a tremendous pull. I will lay odds against him, the other bookmakers won't dare do the same, and, in a word, I may make a million on the Grand Produce Stakes if Snowflake doesn't run to win."

"Do you intend to be generous enough to share this million with me?" asked Sartilly, ironically.

"No, you are a gentleman, and wouldn't take it if I offered it to you; but I tell you what I will do, I will let you off what you owe me. Besides, there is nothing to prevent your laying against him."

"Laying against my own horse?"

"Certainly, of course you won't do it yourself, but I will undertake to get it done for you by an agent, who will hand over to me the winnings minus a commission. This sort of thing is done every day."

"But, my good fellow, you are going on the supposition that Snowflake will be beaten, and yet you have just asserted that he is bound to win. Tell me what you want more plainly."

"Snowflake will win easily if he is allowed to do so."

"I am still in the dark."

"Well, look here, suppose, for instance, he was to get ill."

"If he did so it would be known at once, and no one would back him."

"Suppose it happened the night before the race, and no one was a bit the wiser until he came to the starting-post, not a soul, not even the jockey who rode him."

"Such illnesses don't exist, and never occur. The devil would require to mix himself up to bring about such a thing."

"The devil will, with a little help from some one."

The Count gave a slight shudder, and looked keenly at the bookmaker, who sustained his searching glance without a sign of flinching.

"In plain words, then," said Sartilly, "you propose to give my horse some drug which will prevent his winning?"

"I know of one that would infallibly do so, and, what is better, no one will perceive it. The horse will come to the post in good condition. He will make a good start. When the flag has been dropped he will go well for some fifty yards, and then begin to relax his pace. His jockey will try to hustle him along, and he will make a fresh effort, but in vain, he will seem to be going to sleep, and, in point of fact, he will shut up completely before he gets to the distance post."

"Have you ever, during your long career as a bookmaker, played this pretty little game lucratively?"

"To anyone else, my lord, I should say no, indignantly, but I have nothing to hide from you. I have done it two or three times in England; last year, for instance, at Doncaster."

"Ah, then you managed to persuade an owner of race-horses to ——?"

"Yes, he owed me a pot of money, and roped his horse in order to pay me ; he was a lord, too. He laid against his own horse, and made sixty thousand guineas, and I nearly as much."

"Well, but I suppose after this honourable proceeding he was warned off the course, and forbidden to enter a horse again?"

"Not a bit of it. There was a little fuss about it, and some of his friends cut him, but he soon picked up others, and there were plenty ready to say that he had been precious sharp. Besides, Count, you know that in England we take matters easier than you do in France. For instance, you recollect the other day at Longchamps, the judge made a mistake, and gave a horse as the winner who had come in a bad second. What a disturbance there was. Well, now, in England, when a mistake of this kind occurs, which is not infrequent, no one says a word, or thinks of abusing the judge. There is no appeal from his decision, and it is always looked on as final."

"Yes, that is all right, but to poison a horse which is bound to win, and then to lay against it, is sheer robbery, at least it is called so on this side of the Channel, and I expect that it is pretty much the same on the other."

"You use too strong language for a trifling offence like that. All sorts of dodges are permissible in racing. How often does it happen that a trainer lets it leak out, with the concurrence, of course, of his master, that all the money of the stable has been put on one horse, whereas he is only meant to make the running for another, who has been largely backed."

"Yes, but that is a less scandalous proceeding than the one that you have proposed to me."

"Why less scandalous? the result is the same, the end is the same in one case as in another. It is betting on a certainty, that is all."

"In all countries, and in all languages, it is called swindling."

"Really, Count, you exaggerate matters. Nowhere is it forbidden to make the most of your opportunities. And I know many gentlemen who, if they were placed in the same position as you are, would not hesitate for a moment ; besides, what I propose is simple."

"I should like to know what the drug is that can send a horse to sleep like this. I suppose if I was to pour it over poor Snowflake's hay he would not touch it."

"I should think not, indeed ; but if, when he was feeding, you put a few grains of prepared poppy seed into his mouth in a certain way, I would go bail that he would swallow

them. Only it must be done a few hours before the race, but it is too delicate a job to be confided to the lad that looks after him."

"If a gentleman sank low enough to do such a thing, he would certainly not take his groom into his confidence. But where could he procure such a preparation as you speak of, the effects of which are so sure?"

"He has only to come to me. I know the receipt, and he would not be obliged to go to a chemist's to have it made up, for I have some of the grain, properly seasoned, always about me."

"By Jove, Mr. Oxwall, you are a man of precaution."

"You see, Count, in my profession we must be ready for any chances that may turn up. In our life we are ruined one day, and rolling in money the next, so that it is only natural that I should try by all means in my power to defend my money, and there are times when I can only do so by going a little off the course. But I take all the responsibility of my acts. Suppose, for instance, that Snowflake fell ill at the right moment, is it likely that a man of the Count de Sartilly's rank and position would be suspected? Certainly not. And if, by a yet more impossible chance, there should be an inquiry into the matter, they would find that it was I, who had had the prescription made up. However, I think that the preparation is unknown in France."

"Happily so."

"I have a bottle of it about me. Would you like to see it!"

"To see it, certainly; but as to making use of it, that is another affair."

"Here it is, Count," returned Oxwall, drawing from his pocket a parcel, in which was a very small bottle similar to those used for holding homœopathic globules.

The bottle was filled with small black grains not larger than a pin's head, which the bookmaker shook up under Gontran's very eyes. "Take it with you, Count," said he, with an impudent grin, "and try it on one of your carriage horses, then have him put into harness, and see if he can go."

"Thank you, my carriage horses are all worth about five hundred louis each, and I don't want any of them poisoned."

"You need fear nothing of that kind. The horse will be knocked up for, perhaps, forty-eight hours, but at the end of that time he will be in as good condition as ever."

"I shouldn't like to believe you on oath, and so I will confiscate this bottle to prevent your making a bad use of it."

Oxwall looked steadily at the Count, whose eyes did not sink before the scrutinising gaze of the bookmaker.

The two men understood each other.

"As you please," said the bookmaker, "at least, I do not pretend to influence you. All gentlemen have certain prejudices, which I respect. All I ask of you, Count, is to let me know your decision a few days before the Produce Stakes are run for, the evening before will do, if that will suit you, but I must have time to turn round in. If Snowflake is to win, I must manage matters accordingly. Only I hope that you will permit me to look to you for the money you owe me, on the day he wins, as I shall be unable to get on without it."

"You shall hear from me in good time," answered M. Sartilly, pocketing the bottle. "And now let us separate. People are so uncharitable that they must not see us in conference together. Carriages are beginning to arrive, and I am expecting my wife, as we had arranged to dine together at the Pavilion d'Armenonville."

Oxwall, doubtless, lost no time in making his farewell; but George Cézambre, who had not missed a word of this dialogue, got up hurriedly and left the spot, for he did not wish to meet M. de Sartilly, and was most anxious to see Diana and tell her all that he had learned with as little delay as possible. "And so this is the fine gentleman who looked so contemptuously at me yesterday at Longchamps," muttered George to himself as walked hurriedly to the Pavilion, where, however, he did not intend to make any stay. "He is going to join with a bookmaker to rob the backers who believe that his horse is going to win. He is going to sink to the lowest pitch of degradation. He is an utter blackguard." His object now was to avoid meeting the Count de Sartilly, who would not leave the place as he was expecting his wife, and at the same time not to miss Mlle. de Ganges, who could not be much longer in coming, for the conversation between the two plotters had been of some duration, and it was nearly seven o'clock.

The sun was already setting, much to the satisfaction of George, who ran less risk of being recognised. He went some little distance on the road to Longchamps, having determined to wait there for Diana, so as not to let her come up openly to the restaurant, where the Count and Countess were going to dine. Five minutes after he had taken up his position Diana made her appearance, Domingo, in a gorgeous livery, driving the victoria.

"Get in," said Mlle. de Ganges, "and I will drive you to the restaurant."

"No," answered George, "do you get down. I have much to say to you, and when you have heard it, I do not think you will any longer desire to drive there."

Mlle. de Ganges complied at once with his request, and followed her lover to the side of the road.

"What is the matter?" asked she.

"The Count de Sartilly is here, he is expecting his wife, and they are to dine alone together."

"Ah! the unhappy girl, she has again yielded to his supremacy. Once more she has put faith in his fine words and honeyed promises. M. Vacheron was present when he first began to spread his nets to take her in. She refused to follow her father, and remained alone with her husband, who continued to play the game of reconciliation. Is it to complete the web of the spider that he has appointed this meeting-place? 'His foot is on his native heath,' for he has often brought his mistresses to dine here. They will take their meal in a private room, he will sing of love to her in every possible key, and will soon succeed in turning her head entirely, and be sure that he would not take so much trouble had he not something to gain from her weakness."

"It is a question of money doubtless, for he was just now in consultation with a bookmaker, to whom he owes a large sum of money, and who proposes to him to get quits by aiding him in a disgraceful turf swindle, and the villain has accepted the proposition."

"I should have been much surprised had he not done so. What I want is to rescue Valentine from his clutches. Time is going on: for he will gain her heart once more during dinner, and heaven only knows what he will attempt when he has entirely bewitched her again. M. Vacheron has given me the fullest powers to act, and I am resolved to begin this very night. I have arranged with Lisa, who will be of the greatest help to me. M. Trévières offered his aid, but for reasons that you can understand I declined it. You shall take his place."

"With the greatest pleasure. What have I to do?"

"Hardly anything. You cannot appear, from motives similar to those which prevent M. Trévières doing so; but you may, perhaps, be obliged to represent the element of physical force. You shall be the reserve division of our little army."

"You are going on a dangerous expedition?"

"A difficult one, certainly, and I count upon you. Do not ask me any more at present. I will explain all to you at dinner, for I am going to take you to Le Doyens in the Champs Elysées; we shall not get so much fresh air, but we shall not have the chance of finding ourselves face to face with this man, for should he see us, he will certainly have a suspicion that we have come to interfere with his villainous designs.

"I agree with you that it would be as well not to remain here."

They once more got into the carriage, and Domingo on receiving an order from George turned the horses' heads towards the Porte Maillot, almost at the same moment that Mme. de Sartilly, coming from the Porte Dauphine, drove out of one of the side roads in the Avenue de Longchamps.

CHAPTER XIX

A DREAM

GONTRAN was waiting for his wife in front of the restaurant, and gave her his hand to aid her in alighting from the carriage, with all the grace of a fond lover.

For Valentine this was a new phase of love, which owed its birth to tears and sorrow, and this recovery of her lost happiness had completely changed her. Her pallor had fled, her eyes sparkled, her lips had a smile of gladness upon them, as they had on the first morning of that reconciliation, which had only lasted for a night. But this time she hoped that it would be eternal. She had not profited by the severe lesson that she had experienced. Women who love will never grow wiser.

"I have engaged a private room," whispered Gontran. "It is not yet warm enough to dine in the open air, besides we shall be more alone."

"You have divined my wish exactly," murmured Valentine.

"And we are going to dine like a pair of lovers freed from all restraints; we will intoxicate ourselves with love."

Not only had Gontran engaged a private room, but he had ordered a choice little dinner, and Valentine, who had been accustomed to live very plainly, was surprised at the sight of a table which seemed as if it had been laid to entertain a star of the first magnitude, in fast society. It was covered with flowers, fruits, and all sorts of foreign relishes, Norwegian anchovies, Russian caviare, and pickles from the Antilles. Two bottles, with their necks cased in gilded foil, were reclining in a plated cooler, and Gontran had forgotten nothing, from the fiery soups to the lobster seasoned with American pimento. Valentine had never at any time found herself before so artistically chosen a dinner, for the great society dinners, to which she had sometimes been invited, had not the slightest semblance to this succulent and delicate repast. Everything pleased her in this hastily improvised dinner, and what amused her more than all was that the

waiter evidently took them for a pair of clandestine lovers at least, so she judged from the air of mystery which he indulged in.

Gontran endeavoured to carry out this illusion fully. His manner was delightful, such as he could always put on when he liked, and he was tender and affectionate to her, with just the faintest tinge of melancholy in his tone, which seemed like a delicate allusion to the past storms which had formerly ruffled their now peaceful existence. There was no question now of anything except their mutual affection. The names of M. Vacheron, of Mlle. de Ganges, or of M. Trévières were not mentioned, as if such personages had never existed; not a word even was said about Mme. de Saint Senier, the races, or society in general. Gontran was no longer the same person. The cold and haughty man of the world had disappeared. The aristocratic nobleman had become all at once a simple and affectionate husband, the very husband that Valentine had dreamed of, who gave himself up heart and soul to the unexpected pleasure of this uninterrupted dinner. She had scarcely an opportunity of saying anything in this duet of affection. She looked at Gontran, and all the love of her soul spoke in her eyes. He became more and more affectionate, and appeared to yield to a power that was stronger than his will, and he ended by raising her to the loftiest heights of the purest and most refined sentiment.

"Listen, Valentine," said Gontran, suddenly; "you think that you know me—you take me for a nobleman puffed up with all the pride of birth, stiff and formal as an Englishman, and incapable of passionate feeling, or aspirations after the ideal." Then as the Countess was about to protest, he added passionately: "Suppose I told you that I had a horror of the world in which I lived, that Paris disgusts me, and that I long to quit all, and to devote my life to you?"

"It would be perfect rapture for me—a heaven upon earth; but you, Gontran, how would it suit you?"

"Could you resign yourself to follow me wherever I should lead you—to foreign climes, to Italy first, where we could forget all those who have done so much to mar our happiness, then into some out-of-the-way part of France, to some old castle where we could live for each other? You guess, do you not, that it is jealousy that impels me to speak thus, I shall never cure myself of it whilst we live this Parisian existence, to which we are condemned; and things will not end happily if we continue it. But it is my embarrassed position that binds me to it. Soon it will be so no longer. Fortune has at last come to me. I am going to be rich, very

rich, and shall no more be obliged to ask for aid from your father, nor will he have the opportunity of refusing me! Well, the first use that I wish to make of my wealth is to secure an independence, and we can only find that far, far from Paris. By independence, I mean the absolute and voluntary union of two souls who love each other passionately. No one to come between us. All for each other. We will put everything in common, and we will break all those bonds which link us to the outer world. We shall have no more friends, no more relations——”

“I have my father,” murmured Valentine.

“Your father has cursed you, he has bid you choose between he or I. You have chosen, and he will never forgive you for having done so, and preferred me to him. How many a time has he reproached me harshly, because I was poor when I married you, and because since then, I have availed myself of his wealth. For the future this humiliation will be spared me. I shall be able to lift up my head, and when I have repaid him what I owe him, I shall be a free man again. Perhaps he will disinherit you, and give his fortune to I know not whom. But what matters a few millions more or less? He cannot take back your dowry, and that will prevent your having to go to any one for aid. I will add to it all that I possess. I am going to make my will, and I shall institute you my residuary legatee.”

“Why do you speak of your death?”

“Because it is that alone that can separate us, and because I hope to go first, and I have no desire that my property should go to distant relatives. To whom should I leave it, if not to you? But I remember I have forgotten to tell you how this great change in my fortune has come about. You will naturally ask, and it is time for me to tell you the important news.”

Valentine might indeed have asked what fairy with her magic wand had transformed this landless, moneyless Count into a wealthy man. Helplessly in debt the evening before, the Count now spoke of a mighty heritage that he was going to leave his wife. There was much to be astonished at, and much for her to inquire about in this; but Valentine never thought of doing so. Gontran had come back to her and that was all she thought of. “I have spoken to you,” said he, “of a cousin of mine who after 1830 resigned his commission as an officer in the Royal Guards, and took service with Russia. He had quarrelled with my father, and never communicated with us again. Recently I have learned that he has died at eighty years of age, that he has left no will, and that I am

the sole heir to his property, estimated at four millions. I am, therefore, almost as rich as you are. And the reason I rejoice at this is, that we can live for ourselves now, without anyone having a word to say. Were it not for this windfall people would not have hesitated to say that I was living upon you, but now that we are almost upon an equality as regards fortune, no one can say a word."

"Were you poor I would not for a moment have hesitated to follow you," answered the Countess, quickly. "But do not say another word about either your fortune or mine. Tell me rather that you love me, tell me so without cessation, so that I may accustom myself to my newly-found happiness, and begin to believe in it."

"Will you believe it when we shall be far away from France, in the land where the orange trees bloom."

"Would that it were to-morrow."

"And so say I. Did I but listen to the dictates of my heart, I would bear you away to-night, without a word to any one. What a happy dream to go away and to wake up in the land of the sun; to come and go without let or hindrance, until we had found some nest in which we could spend the rest of our lives in mutual love."

"Ah, it would be too much happiness," murmured Valentine.

"Yes, and the dream will soon be realised, but for the moment I am still tied by a cord that I cannot free myself from. It is not so easy to escape from Society as to enter it. I must first get rid of my partnership with Saint Senier. We have three horses entered, one for the Produce Stakes, one for the Chantilly Derby, and a third for the Grand Prix, and that I may settle accounts with my partner, I must await the result of these three races. It is a matter of two months, more or less, but during these two months we must be much together. Are we agreed then? Let us drink to our love," concluded Sartilly, raising on high a brimming glass of champagne.

Valentine held out hers to him. He touched it with his lips, and she emptied it at a draught. That evening she seemed to wish to experience all the phases of intoxication. "Then," continued Gontran, "I have not a minute to lose to warn Saint Senier that I propose to dissolve our connection after the Grand Prix has been run for. He is most punctilious in business matters, and if I do not give him due notice he will play me some trick or other, and I do not wish to leave any legal proceedings behind me, nor to have any judicial question with regard to my cousin's inheritance. Certainly there is no one to dispute it with me, but it is necessary to

look ahead, and in any case I should have to go through all the forms prescribed by the Foreign Office. Who knows even if I may not have to go to Russia?"

"We could go there together?" said Valentine.

"And a very good idea too. It would be like a second honeymoon trip, and I will do all I can that you may not compare it disadvantageously with the first one; but in the meantime I must leave you this evening. Oh, not for any length of time, and I will first take you home. Then I must set out in search of my notary, it is his night to be at the Opera. I shall catch him there between nine and ten o'clock, and I will talk to him between the acts. Then I must go down to the club, where Saint Senior always drops in about twelve. My conversation with him will very likely be longer than I could desire, but I shall be home about one." Then bending over from his seat so as to reach his wife's ear, he whispered, "Will you be expecting me?"

The answer was lost in a passionate kiss.

The remainder of the dinner was nothing but an interchange of words of affection, mingled with projects for the future. They would start at the beginning of summer, and would not return to Paris again until after a long honeymoon trip, and would leave it again like the swallows at the commencement of the winter. Gontran once more skilfully alluded to the jealousy which consumed him, and which an absence from Paris could alone cure, and with equal cunning he asserted that most likely an absence of this kind might soften the anger of M. Vacheron, who would no longer be prejudiced against his son-in-law, when he saw that he had again become a model husband, having cast aside all his errors, freed from all his debts, and nearly as wealthy as his wife. Once again he spoke as if by chance, and not arrogating to himself any merit, of this will that he was going to make, leaving all his fortune to his wife, for he knew well that Valentine would not be behindhand in generosity. The reconciled couple drove home in their carriage, nestling up closely to each other, and during the drive Valentine suddenly asked him, "How do you set about making a will?" To which Gontran replied with a smile, "Nothing in the world more simple. I daresay you think that you must go to a lawyer about it; not a bit of it. You just write your will on any kind of blank paper, sign it, and date it, and it will hold as good as if it were drawn up on any amount of stamped paper. I did so, for after your father had left, and when we had settled matters between ourselves I went up to my room to dress myself to dine with you, when my valet handed me the letter from the French Consul at

St. Petersburg. I ought, perhaps, to have come at once and shown it to you, but I preferred to make a surprise of it, and to communicate it to you between two kisses. But the first thought that I had, was to make you a sharer in my new good fortune. I therefore took a sheet of my finest paper and put down my last wishes in two lines, for no more were required: 'I make my beloved wife, Valentine Louise Clotilde, my sole executor and legatee,' then I added, 'in token of the happiness she has caused me during our married life.' Then, I put this writing into a large envelope, and wrote on it the usual official words, 'This sealed envelope contains my last will and testament,' and I locked it up in my desk. When I get home I will give it to you, for it may as well be in your custody as in mine."

"And then we will make an exchange," whispered the Countess.

Sartilly hardly caught these last words, but he guessed their import. He had got everything he wanted, and all that remained for him was to continue charming to the end, and he was so. When they reached home he left the carriage waiting outside, and accompanied his wife to her own apartments, and so they once again found themselves in that room which Gontran had not entered since a certain night in the past February, and Valentine would fain have kept him there. She felt however that the expression of an inopportune wish might spoil all, and sure of seeing him again in a few hours, she let him go, after bidding him a tender farewell. A few minutes afterwards she heard the sound of the wheels of the carriage that bore him away. He must have stopped on the stairs to give some orders to one of the servants, for it took but a brief time to descend from the Countess's room to the front door.

CHAPTER XX

THE AWAKENING

VALENTINE did not, however, attempt to enter into this calculation, she only hastened to shut herself up, and to await in solitude the return of her husband.

Since Lisa's dismissal Valentine had almost entirely dispensed with the services of a maid. She much preferred to dress and undress herself sooner than permit the odious Florence to come near her.

It was Florence's custom to prepare the bedroom in the evening, and then not to put in an appearance until the next

morning. The Countess had made up her mind now that she and her husband were again reconciled, to ask him to send her away at once, and she felt sure that he would not refuse her this slight satisfaction. Her room was a perfect little nest, filled with artistic nic-nacks, and hung with Chinese silk, with curtains to the doors of Gobelin tapestry; wax candles burnt in candelabra of exquisite workmanship, a lamp made of old Sevres, shed a mellow light over a rosewood table, the very one upon which the Countess had, some time ago copied some lines written by her husband, who had taken them away. But Valentine did not think of what had passed before. She sat down in the same place and began hastily to draw up a will, according to the form which her husband had almost dictated to her. Her wish was to show it to him, and to place it in his hands as soon as he returned. She read it twice over to assure herself that she had omitted neither date nor signature, and in order to carry out Gontran's wishes to the letter, she put the will into an envelope and placed it on her writing table. In doing this she raised her head and saw an eye gleaming on her through a hole in one of the flowers embroidered on the hangings, an eye that seemed to follow her every movement. At first Valentine thought that she was deceived, and that what she saw was merely the effect of the light on the hangings. She closed her eyes, opened them again suddenly, and gazed steadily in the same direction.

The eye was still there, just on a level with her face; it shone against the dark background of the hangings like a black diamond set in bronzed silver.

Valentine would have started to her feet, but she lacked the power. She remained helpless in her chair, paralysed by that object, as the bird is fascinated by the deadly snake. Who was watching her thus? Certainly it could not be her husband, for she had heard him drive off to the opera. Was it one of her servants, the valet or the maid? Francis or Florence? What object could they have, what information did they wish to gain? And perhaps this was not the first time that they had practised this treacherous manœuvre. Whilst the Countess asked herself these and other questions, the eye disappeared. When she felt that this terrifying glance was no longer cast upon her, she plucked up courage and walked straight up to that portion of the wall to examine it closely. On feeling the hangings she found a round hole pierced in the centre of one of those strange Chinese flowers with red petals surrounded by dark leaves. At a distance the hole was lost in the dark background, and it was necessary to discover its existence by the sense of touch, but the aperture

went right through the wall into the little sitting-room where that very day Mme. de Sartilly had received her father. She placed her cheek against it, and felt the wind blow through the orifice on to it. How was it that she had never noticed it before, she who passed so much of her time there, her days in the sitting-room, and her nights in the lonely chamber? She could not comprehend it, and she had the courage to continue the explorations which she had just commenced. She took up a candle and opened the door, without asking herself if she should find anyone on the other side, who, with evil motives, was keeping a watch upon her at that hour. She saw no one, but she found that the hangings had been adroitly cut away with a pair of sharp scissors, and that beneath it the wood-work of the partition had been perforated. This mysterious work had evidently been effected quite recently, and must have been done with some object; but with what object, the Countess could not guess. And as all her thoughts were now on Gontran, she made up her mind to tell him of this strange event, and to put herself under his protection. Until the time when he should come back to her, and before shutting herself up again in her room, she went out on to the staircase, which was still lighted, and bending over the banisters she saw that the footman who was usually on duty in the hall, was not at his post. She listened, but could not detect the slightest sound. It seemed as if the house was uninhabited. Valentine turned back, went into the sitting-room, and threw open a little door which led to the bath-room which adjoined her dressing-room, which again communicated with her bedroom, from which it was only separated by a vast sheet of glass. Valentine therefore was secure in her own rooms, and after bolting the door she threw herself on to a lounge to rest, not to sleep, but rather to reflect on her position. Frightened as she was at the strange discovery, she said to herself that no doubt all would be explained presently, and that the guilty party would be discovered, and dismissed at once. Then she let her thoughts wander to her husband. In a few hours he would be with her again, and then the happy life that he had spoken of would commence once more. Little by little she lulled herself to repose with these ideas of love and hope; she forgot the present in the future, the reality for the dream, and she allowed herself to sink into a half-sleep, her eyelids partially closed, soothed by the thoughts of happiness to come. When she again opened her eyes, she could at first hardly say where she was. The perforated hangings were no longer in front of her, she had turned her back on the dressing-room, and was facing a large looking-glass, which was

fully lighted up by the candles in the candelabra. Was she dreaming still, or did she see in it, a woman draped in black, who seemed to emerge from the wall at the end of the dressing-room and move towards her noiselessly as a ghost? A cold shudder chilled her blood, but paralysed as she was by terror, she made no effort to move, though she felt that some unknown danger was near. The phantom glided over the carpet, approached a lacquered stand upon which stood a glass of orange flower-water, which it was the Countess's custom to sip before going to bed, and poured something into it from a small bottle that it held in its hand.

At that instant Valentine caught sight of the face, and recognised Florence.

Valentine had sufficient command over herself to retain her absolute immobility. She did not tremble, she hardly breathed. Florence, who had been looking at her in the mirror, fancied that she still slept, and moving slowly away, disappeared, as though the wall had opened to afford her a means of exit.

Valentine could hear an almost imperceptible creaking sound, and then all was still. She knew that there was a door there, but that door was always locked from within. The wretched woman then who had opened it, must either have been furnished with a false key, or had one made for her. Valentine examined the door and found that the hinges had been recently oiled. The glass of orange-flower water sent forth a strong odour of bitter almonds. Florence had therefore poured prussic acid into it. The poisoner had foreseen everything, the crime was to be accomplished at a given time, and was a premeditated one, as every arrangement must have been made before the Countess had come home. The hole that had been bored in the woodwork would enable the plotter to watch her as she was waiting for the return of her husband. Florence must have calculated that on her return the Countess would have been thirsty, and that was why she had delayed pouring out the poison, for she was no doubt aware that prussic acid evaporates when exposed to the action of the air. The cruel creature hoped that Valentine would fall as though struck by lightning the instant she tasted the orange-flower water. In terror and amazement Valentine asked herself, "What have I done to her, what would she gain by my death?" Then as her moments of agonised fear came back, "Is she coming back again, will she attack me?" But she soon felt that she had no cause to fear this. Florence was anxious for Valentine's death, but she did not wish to kill her with her own hands. Her object was to make the world believe that

it was a suicide, so that no one might accuse her of the murder. She had sufficient courage to pour out the poison, but not to commit an act of violence. What she wanted was that her crime should be crowned with impunity. Valentine made up her mind that things must rest as they were, until Gontran's return, when she would tell him all. The cowardly poisoner was perhaps close at hand. She was perhaps even now watching the movements of her intended victim by some other orifice which she had prepared; and if this were the case it was better that she should believe that Valentine had discovered nothing. With astounding coolness Valentine took up the glass and placed it on a small table by the side of her bed, as she always did before retiring to rest; then she began to move about her dressing-room like a woman who is about to go to bed, but is in no particular hurry to do so. This manœuvre was only for the sake of inducing Florence to believe, that is, if she were watching from behind the partition, that in a short time Valentine would begin to undress slowly, and, reclining on the settee, await the arrival of her husband, and that at that moment perhaps she would empty the glass at a draught. Although Valentine no longer thought that her enemy would return, she bolted the door through which the would-be murderess had effected her entrance, and then returning to her bedroom extinguished the candles, which were beginning to burn down. She only left the lamp burning, and a light which she placed by the side of the glass of orange-flower water. Then she took a new novel from a shelf, and sitting down before the little rosewood table upon which she had placed her will, endeavoured to read.

The clock struck midnight. "Yet another hour to wait," thought Valentine, "ah, Gontran! My Gontran, what will you say when you hear that my maid has tried to poison me?" A sharp sound caused her to start nervously, it was a handful of gravel thrown against the window-panes from outside. This signal however did not alarm her for it was thus that Lisa since her dismissal by M. de Sartilly always made known her presence. The Countess was to answer it by tapping the tips of her fingers against the glass, and throwing a cloak over her shoulders, gliding through her rooms, and stealing softly down the stairs, and through the hall, to rejoin Lisa who was waiting for her in a spot which had been settled on between them. But now all things had changed. The poisoner doubtless had not yet returned to her garret, and was perhaps hanging about the very staircase down which Valentine would have to pass, and there would therefore be the risk of meeting her. Besides the Countess

had resolved to discontinue these nocturnal meetings with her former maid. Gontran had expressly forbidden her to hold any communication with her, and since their reconciliation Valentine had sworn never to disobey him again. What good then could she derive from a meeting with Lisa, who could only offer condolences which now were ill-timed. Her husband alone was the one to whom she looked for protection against the machinations of the terrible Florence. However she could not allow Lisa to remain in the garden where she might be surprised at any moment. It was absolutely necessary to send her away. This was easy. Valentine before sitting down had pushed an armchair against the orifice in the wall, so that no one might be able to watch her, and she therefore felt safe in communicating with her former maid. She ran to the window, opened it, and found herself almost face to face with a woman who had ascended by the gardener's ladder which had been placed against the wall of the house.

At this unexpected apparition the Countess started back, but a voice which she at once recognised said, "Have no fear, it is I."

"Diana ! What do you want here ?" exclaimed Valentine, much surprised.

"I wish to save you : are you alone ?"

"Yes, but leave me, I entreat you, my husband is coming back soon."

"Good, I am yet in time then, but come with me, I will help you down the ladder."

"Down the ladder, and for what reason ?"

"I have come for you. Your father is waiting for you and has sent me for you."

"My father does not know that I and Gontran are reconciled once more. Tell him from me that he need have no more fears for me, and that I will not come with you."

"You are determined to die then ?"

"To die, what does that mean ?"

"That if you do not leave this house immediately, you will be a dead woman before morning, for the woman who has charge of you, will murder you to-night."

"How did you learn that ?"

"What does it matter how I gained my information, I know that it is a fact. Come down I tell you ; it is impossible for me to tell you anything perched as I am on this ladder ; but when I have told you all, you can if you like go back, for I shall not keep you by force, if you do not believe me. Come, I must speak to you."

Mlle. de Ganges did not openly accuse the Count of the

intended crime, and Valentine thought that her former friend was only going to supply her with additional proofs against the murderess Florence. There was still an hour before Gontran's return, and it would be better to settle matters before he came back. "I shall not keep you long," continued Diana, "and your father will never forgive you for refusing to listen to me." This menace made the Countess decide. Mlle. de Ganges assisted her to climb through the window, and supported her until she had got her feet on the topmost rungs of the ladder, and as soon as they had reached the ground, she hurried her off to a side walk, near the spot where George Cézambre had leapt over the railings some two months before.

"Tell me," said Valentine, "why did this woman endeavour to poison me; tell me the reason that I may inform Gontran who will save me from her."

"Tell me first how you discovered it," returned Mlle. de Ganges, for she had only spoken at random of a crime which she thought was likely to be committed, and found that she had guessed the truth, but she took care to betray no astonishment at her discovery. "I dined with my husband at the Pavilion d'Armenonville," answered Valentine, "he drove home with me, and left me for an appointment on a business matter. After his departure I dozed a little, and when half awake, I saw in my glass a woman creep softly into the room; she held in her hands a phial, the contents of which she poured into my tumbler of orange flower water, and then disappeared. I did not move, and she thought that I had not seen her——"

"And she thought that before going to bed you would have drank the poison, and that your husband on his return would have found you dead. The plot was skilfully laid."

"But tell me what could her motive have been in wishing to put me out of the way?"

"What, can you not guess that your husband bribed her to poison you?"

"Gontran! That is false, and had I known that you were going to calumniate him, I would never have come down. But not another word on the subject. Leave me."

"Do you know what this man whom you defend has done, and is going to do?"

"I wish to know nothing; do not keep me here any longer."

"You shall not go until you have listened to me. He is overwhelmed with debt, and in order to clear himself he has entered into a conspiracy with a bookmaker to commit an abominable fraud. They are going to lay against a

horse that he owns, which is certain to win the Grand Produce Stakes, one of the most important races of the Spring Meeting. But the evening before the race that honourable gentleman the Count de Sartilly, will administer to the poor beast a drug which will prevent it from winning, and he will do this with his own hands. What do you say of a gentleman who can commit such an infamy? Is he not quite capable of having his wife poisoned?"

"And suppose I were to tell you, that Gontran has just inherited the immense property of a relative, who has left four millions. Will you then allow that these statements were false. Why should he have recourse now to such ignoble means to pay his debts?"

"I will answer you by saying that this legacy falls in at too convenient a moment for me to believe in it; and besides if there were a particle of truth in it, such an event would be well known."

"His relation died in Russia, and the news only reached him to-day."

"At what o'clock?" asked Mlle. de Ganges, quickly.

"At four o'clock, just after my father left me."

"How does it happen then that an hour after M. de Sartilly accepted the disgraceful propositions of this book-maker, who is his principal creditor?"

"How can you prove that?"

"Will you believe in the word of a man who risked his life to save your honour? In the word of George Cézambre?"

"Your lover!"

"Yes, my lover, he has never told a lie. He was waiting for me at the Pavillon d'Armenonville, where he heard without wishing to do so, all the conversation between your husband, and William Oxwall; and now your husband has dared to invent this tale of an inheritance. But now if it were true, is he not a thousand times more infamous to plan such a robbery, when he can pay his debts without having recourse to dishonourable means. He has made up the whole story I tell you, and in doing so he had some hidden design."

"What design, I defy you to show me one. And I tell you in addition, that all Paris will soon know that my husband's position is a changed one, and that his life will change with it. I am going to Russia with him, and afterwards he will pay all his debts, and purchase a country house somewhere, where we can live together happily. Do you know what his first thought was, when he learned that he had inherited this fortune? He made his will, and left it all to me!"

"He left you a fortune that does not exist, and he doubtless hoped that you would make your will in his favour."

"I have already done so."

"When?" asked Mlle. de Ganges, eagerly.

"This evening, it is there on the little rosewood table that you know."

"You made it before that woman came into your room, whilst you were half asleep."

"Yes, before that."

"Ah! now I understand it all, she was hidden somewhere, and kept a watch on you, and it was then that she saw you writing."

"How do you know that? I did see an eye looking at me through a hole in the hangings."

"And do you not see that that woman knew that you were making your will, and that she only waited for its completion to pour the poison into your glass. Had you drank it your husband would now be a wealthy man. He had counted on that, and laid his plans accordingly. The dinner was one of them, the announcement of the legacy another, and when he told you that he had executed a will in your favour, he foresaw that you would do the same with regard to him. You were condemned to death, and Florence was charged with the carrying out of the sentence."

The Countess shuddered, she began to see the truth in all its naked hideousness.

"Come with me," urged Diana. "If the Count returns and finds you living, he will force the poison down your throat by main force. Do not give him the chance of committing another crime."

"Where are you going to take me to?" asked Valentine in trembling accents.

"To your father, he is close at hand in a cab, with Lisa. Where did you think that I was going to take you. For the future your home must be with your father. I vowed that I would restore his daughter to him. Your husband will not dare to seek you in your father's house. But come quickly, I hear the sound of a carriage. It is the Count returning home."

Diana led her friend hastily away in the direction of the little gate, the key of which Lisa had given her, and as they passed through it, Gontran's cabriolet stopped before the main gate in the Avenue d'Eylau.

As the fugitives walked quickly down the Rue Villejust Valentine said in a half whisper, "It is all over. I may die from the shock, but I am determined never to see him again, I despise him now, and I pray heaven that I may end

by hating him. Only swear to me, by all the love you have for me, that you will never tell my father that he wished to poison me."

"I swear it to you," answered Diana, and she thought to herself, "ah ! poor creature, she loves him still !"

CHAPTER XXI

"I WILL DO IT"

THE month of April is certainly the worst month in the epicure's almanack. No game, no truffles, no oysters, and hardly any fruit worth speaking of. The lovers of the pleasures of the table curse it, and Balzac, the great Balzac, has stigmatised it in this well-known phrase, "The terrible dessert of the month of April." But still there are compensations in it. There are races nearly every day at Longchamps, at Auteuil, at Vincennes, at St. Ouen. The meetings of the sporting world draw all the country aristocracy and fashion to Paris, and scarcely a week passes without a first appearance taking place at some popular theatre. All Paris enjoys itself before departing to drink the waters, or to disport itself at some fashionable bathing-place. It is the fastest part of the season, dear to sporting men and dandies, and to the ladies of the irregular division in every rank. People in a small way of business, and the really poor, take no notice of holiday time, *they* work all the year round.

The Countess de Sartilly, since she had sought refuge in her father's house, had dropped out of society, and Diana, in spite of her rash step, could hardly be ranked amongst the fast women of Paris. But the Viscountess de Saint Senier, in spite of her five-and-thirty years, was the fastest of the fast. Age has but little to do with it, for, during the second Empire, women could be seen who had passed the perilous point of forty years, and who yet were noticeable by that extraordinary freedom of manner, which was then one of the distinguishing marks of fashionable life. To take up such a position, even beauty is not absolutely indispensable. Rank, wealth, and cynical manners, are excellent substitutes for it. Mme de Saint Senier then possessed all that was requisite to play the part of an arrant flirt of fashionable life, a character highly appreciated by men about town and newspaper reporters. Her name was sure to be found in all the accounts of aristocratic re-unions, whilst the descriptions of her dress filled the columns of the journals devoted to the fashions. And yet this Viscountess, who still had a tender weakness for

her coachman, often took the chair at charitable meetings. She managed somehow to find time for everything. You met her on the race-courses, in stage boxes, and in excellent society. She was nearly always alone, but occasionally accompanied by some lady friend of similar tastes to herself, but seldom with her husband who contented himself with keeping guard over her from a distance. Flying the matrimonial flag, she sailed boldly through the troubled waters of Parisian society, and managed to do what she liked without being talked about by the indulgent moralists of the upper ten. She never missed a race meeting, and she often was accompanied to them by the Baroness de Réchampy a little widow who had soon consoled herself for the loss of her husband, a colonel in the army, and who was sufficiently pretty to attract a little attention without monopolising all the compliments of the male sex. The Viscountess did not take much interest in the improvement of the equestrian genus, but during the Horse Show, the course is a neutral territory, in which ladies of high rank are elbowed by the Bohemian class composed of actresses, adventuresses, and ladies about whose antecedents there is no doubt. Both these hostile camps come to this meeting to inspect each other. It is a grand review of beauty and dress. Mme. de Saint Senier prided herself on her intimate knowledge of the manners and customs of the world of gallantry.

She was also delighted to see strong and active riders leap over the fences in the military races, and amongst them all she preferred the junior officers, as she confessed to a weakness for young men. To-day was one of the last meetings of the Equestrian Congress in the Palace of Industry, and the place was crowded. There was a strong detachment of the "half-world" in full war paint. The Faubourg Saint Germain, and the Faubourg Saint Honoré, were also well to the front. Nearly every class of society had sent its representatives. Even the citizen element was there in the shape of mothers accompanied by daughters on the look out for husbands; for on these occasions the Palace of Industry rivals the Opera Comique, where from time immemorial, young ladies have disported themselves with their future husbands, under the careful supervision of their mothers. There were as there always is, two separate camps, in the Stands. On the right were the nominally respectable woman, and on the left those who made no parade of their virtue, but who really were not much worse than their neighbours. But both of these classes mixed freely in the passages and on the course during the intervals between the races. Every description of toilet was to be seen on the graduated seats of the Stands, and as

fashion is not so arbitrary as it used to be there were as many varieties of dresses in shape and colour, as there are flowers in a garden. The Viscountess had for this occasion put on a sort of military jacket of Havana cloth with scarlet collar and facings. She wore a Louis XVI. hat with a huge plume of ostrich feathers on it, which would have utterly dwarfed a woman of less majestic proportions, but which rather became her Juno-like beauty. The brilliant Baroness had contented herself with a straw-coloured Russian guipure dress, with a draping of black net, and a little plush hat embroidered with pearls, and trimmed with a bunch of wheat ears not much larger than her closed hand. Both ladies attracted a good deal of notice. They were looking attentively at the rival divisions, and exchanging remarks regarding their toilets.

"Always the same faces," said Mme. de Saint Senier. "Not a new recruit amongst those girls."

"And yet I fancy that I see a fresh one," murmured the Baroness Réchamby, turning her glasses on to the Stand on the left hand. "There's that red-haired woman in a mousquetaire hat. She is not so bad, and looks as if she had some go in her."

"She is not exactly a new recruit."

"What is she then, she doesn't look like a business woman?"

"She is not even so good as that, she is a governess that was kicked out of her place."

"You know her then?"

"A good deal too well, she was one of Mme. de Sartilly's servants, when she stepped over the boundary."

"Good, I recollect it all now, I heard the story, she got quite a young fellow to carry her off."

"Yes, and she is bringing him up by hand, she seduced the poor boy who was so nice, and she will ruin him before she has done with him, she is a hussy of the worst kind."

"Is her lover, that pretty boy here?" asked the Baroness with some appearance of curiosity.

"No, I don't see him, I expect that she has left him at home, she takes him out with her, or ties him up like a King Charles' spaniel."

"What a sad thing. Such women ought to be locked up. But tell me, my dear. You were speaking of Mme. de Sartilly, is it true that she has disappeared?"

"Perfectly so, she has left her husband to weep alone."

"Has she gone off with some man."

"Most likely. They say that she is at her father's, but I doubt the fact very much. I don't pity her, a mere prude, one of those creatures of low extraction who get into society

by their marriage. She always laid herself out for virtue, but I have always distrusted those goody-goodies—'still waters run deep' you know, and the proverb is seldom wrong."

"How does her husband take it?"

"Sartilly? Oh! I suppose he has consoled himself by this time, although my husband says that this rupture has ruined him. He used to live on his wife's income, this fine de Sartilly, and if she gets a divorce, on my word I don't know what he will do, for he has been living at the rate of three hundred thousand francs a year. I should not take the least interest in what becomes of him, but M. de Saint Senier has been foolish enough to mix himself up with him in running horses, and if he drops his money, I fear that I shall feel it. My husband is not a very pleasant fellow at any time, but when he loses money he is simply diabolical. Ah, you are a lucky woman to be a widow, remember that, and don't get married again."

"I don't intend to," answered the Baroness with a smile. "But I can see M. de Saint Senier, down there at the foot of the judge's chair, he is talking to a handsome young fellow, do you know him?"

The Viscountess looked in the direction in which her friend pointed, blushed, and muttered under her breath, "Ah, he never does the right thing, now if he would only bring him up here, the red-haired woman would burst with rage."

"What, then, that young fellow is——?"

"That creature's lover, M. George Cézambre, a countryman of mine newly arrived from Mauritius, with letters of introduction to my husband, who presented him to me; a poor innocent creole who has let himself be picked up by that jade."

"Yes, I can understand that you are not overpleased with the affair, but look—they are going to part, they shake hands, and are evidently on the most friendly terms; but your creole is off to the other side where his love with the flame-coloured hair is sitting in state, and your husband is talking to a gentleman in the passage."

"Sartilly, on my word, and by their manner, I do not think that they seem on very good terms. They are having a row. It looks as if my beloved husband was asking his partner to settle up, and he doesn't seem inclined to do so. How pleased I am. I wish that they would ruin each other. My fortune is at my own disposal, and I would not lend Saint Senier a rap even if he came down to the lowest ebb. That would teach him not to let a poor young fellow fall into the snares of an adventuress, a boy who was confided to him from my native land."

Anger does not always prevent people from seeing clearly, and the Viscountess was right in guessing that the interview between the partners was a stormy one. They had met by chance after not having seen each other for ten days, and an explanation was inevitable between them. Saint Senior began by addressing Gontran. "Will you have the goodness," said he, to let me know why you have given no signs of life for more than a week?" The language in which this question was put was most courteous, but the speaker's manner was not conciliatory, and Gontran perceived it in a moment. "My dear fellow," returned he coldly, "I am not obliged to tell you the use I make of my time, but I am surprised that you have not guessed the reason of my temporary disappearance."

"I heard that your wife had left you suddenly, and I supposed that her departure had caused you some fresh embarrassments; but that seemed no reason for you to keep yourself away, especially from me, but we have interests in common which are of too great importance for us to neglect to look after them, as long as our partnership lasts."

"I have no intention of dissolving it."

"Nor I, at least not at present, but I have both the right, and the wish to know how we stand."

"Our situation is in no way changed."

"Mine is not, I know; but yours, in plain words, what is your position?"

"You mean that you wish to know if my present resources permit me to remain your partner?"

"Precisely so, and my question ought not to surprise you?"

"I am perfectly ready to answer it, but not in this walled passage. If you will come with me to the portico by the exit gate, we can talk at our ease, we shall find no one there but footmen waiting for their masters."

"I am quite willing, only we shall have to pass under the eyes of my wife. There, you can see her up there, with the little Baroness de Réchampy. My wife is not very pleased with me, she says I shall ruin myself over our stable."

"You will be able to re-assure her this evening."

"I hope so, ah! I perceive over there the beautiful Diana de Ganges. Had she nothing to do with your wife's flight?"

"Nothing, I don't trouble my head about the woman."

"And you are right for the place is occupied. Look, her lover has taken his seat by her. I was talking to him just now, and I can tell you that he is tightly hooked. By the way, did you know that he had been elected at our club?"

"I did not; it is a matter in which I am not interested."

"I proposed him, he had not a single black ball. I shall

take him over there this evening unless she carries him off, for she seems to do what she likes with him. She will never make a man of the world of him; if he had a grain of sense he would not show himself everywhere with her as he does. Well, he is young yet, and is rich enough to do as he pleases, and I tell you that if you wish to dissolve our partnership, this young fellow could easily be got to take your place."

"I shan't give him the chance."

Whilst the two men were thus conversing with strained politeness, they were slowly making their way through the crowd, but at length they contrived to reach the main gateway which opens on to the Champs Elysées. Sartilly took his friend into a corner, and then spoke out plainly to him. "You believed that I was ruined by the strange conduct of my wife, well my dear fellow nothing could have happened more fortunately for me."

"I can't see that."

"And yet it is most simple. My wife fled whilst I was at the club, after we had dined alone together at a restaurant, during which we were completely reconciled. She escaped alone by the window of her room, at one o'clock in the morning, without leaving a word of explanation or farewell. There are only two ways of accounting for such conduct, either she is mad, or else she has a lover from whom she cannot bear to be separated."

"Excuse me, but I thought that she had taken refuge with her father, M. Vacheron."

"You are right, but that does not respect either of my suppositions. Her father has been on bad terms with me for a long time past, and in either case he was compelled to receive her, were it only for appearance sake, and there the matter rests."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that he dare not take a single step against me, and that I defy him to institute any legal proceedings against me. He knows perfectly well that he would lose his case, for the wrong is all on his daughter's side."

"Humph," said M. de Saint Senier, not yet quite convinced.

"We will allow if you like that there are faults on both sides, but my wife has put herself out of court, by leaving her husband's domicile. I have the power to send a Commissary of Police to compel her to return, but as you can understand, I have no wish to do so, and M. Vacheron is as anxious as I am to avoid an open scandal, he will therefore leave things as they are."

"Yes, as long as he is permitted to have his daughter with

him, of whom they say he is very fond, and I have also heard that he is not very affectionately disposed towards you. But I very much doubt whether he will let you make use, as you have hitherto done, of the income derived from the settlement, for he will most decidedly look after her pecuniary interests. Any father in his place would do the same, and M. Vacheron is known to be a thorough man of business."

"All that can be arranged in a friendly manner, I can answer for that. If my wife had been persuaded to institute proceedings for a separation, or a divorce, I should already have been served with a citation."

"You may get one to-morrow."

"My dear Saint Senier, you know nothing of my father-in-law, and less of my wife. The worthy old man only lives for, and by his daughter. He has done all he could ever since our marriage to separate her from me, and he has at last succeeded. All he wants is her, and now that Valentine is safely with him, what does he care what I do with the income. She does not require it, nor does he, and he knows that I cannot touch the principle."

"What do you think he will do then?"

"I think that he will propose some amicable arrangement, so as to leave matters as they are. He will keep his daughter, and I, the income."

"Well, I hope that all will turn out as you think, but you do not take into consideration that Mme. de Sartilly may desire to obtain her freedom by legal means. Formerly I had understood that she was satisfied with a separation by mutual consent, but since the new law has been passed, she may desire to marry again."

"My wife desires something quite different."

"What is that?"

"To be reconciled with me again. You may think me very conceited. But if I were to weary you by going through all our marriage difficulties, you would find that they arose from my wife loving me too deeply."

"There are very few husbands who could say the same."

"I envy them, for they can live in peace. Valentine by her jealousy and her requirements made our married life insupportable. I would not for anything in the world, take her back again; but I repeat to you, that my pecuniary interests are in no way threatened."

"Then my dear fellow, all has happened for the best, but I will not conceal from you that I was growing very uneasy."

"As to my solvency, I suppose."

"You are right, there are strange rumours afloat."

"What do they say, that I am a ruined man?"

"They say that during the last two months, you have lost enormous sums of money at the club, and on the turf.

"What does that matter if I have paid them?"

"Nothing at all; only permit me to say that I know you owe a lot of money to William Oxwall."

"Did he confide this to you?"

"No. Oxwell is far too discreet. On the contrary he declares you are one of his best customers, and he has never done anything but crack up your transactions with him. But in Paris everything gets about. The other day at Longchamps, in my presence, you dropped four thousand louis to him. I haven't asked him if you have paid him, though I met him here just now."

"Ah! he is here, is he?"

"Yes, over by the stables, and in an excellent humour. He expects, doubtless, to make a good day of it, as next Sunday I also hope to do."

"Let us go back for a moment, my dear Saint Senier, to the chief topic of our discourse. My bets are on my own responsibility, the same as my debts, and affect me alone. What has made you so uneasy, and reasonably so, is our partnership? What have you to fear? Did I not put down my share of the expenses?"

"Doubtless—but——"

"But what? Our capital is not all spent, I suppose?"

"We have enough—only——"

"And we are beginning the season under excellent conditions. Amongst the horses which we purchased from Lord Winter with their engagements, are two with which we ought to do wonders, Drawn Sword and Snowflake; the first will very likely win the Grand Prix, and the second the Produce Stakes."

"I have the same hopes that you have, but just one last question: if the bill that Mme. de Sartilly signed is not paid at maturity, what will happen?"

"You might just as well ask me when the moon will drop on to the earth, one is as possible as the other."

"It was impossible as long as you were on good terms with your wife, but now——"

"Now more than ever so. M. Vacheron will pay it."

"The reason that I put the question to you, my dear Sartilly, is because the lender is getting uneasy, and yesterday at the club he told me that he should go after to-day, and show the bill to your father-in-law, and ask him if he would meet it."

"Present the bill before it becomes due! that would be a

complete breach of our convention," returned M. de Sartilly, quickly. "It has never been accepted, and this man promised to retain it in his own hands until the 15th of June."

"I know that," answered Saint Senier, "but what can you expect? a cardroom waiter is not a gentleman. Augustus for some days past has heard the likelihood of your divorce talked about everywhere, and that you are ruined, lock, stock, and barrel, so that he has lost his head a little, and I don't wonder at it. Three hundred thousand francs is a big sum, however rich he may be. He is absolutely on thorns, and cannot sleep."

"He will do so soon. I will undertake to smoothe his pillow."

"And you will act wisely, my dear fellow, for in the state of mind that he is, he is quite capable of committing some act of folly, which might be prejudicial to your interests. You cannot imagine how excited he has become by the ideas that he conjures up. Do you know he asked me whether now that the Countess had definitely quarrelled with you, she might not declare that she had never signed the bill at all."

Sartilly had great command over himself, but he grew pale at these words. "Ah!" said he in a hoarse voice, "Does his audacity go so far as to accuse me of having committed forgery?"

"No, no. I do not think that he goes as far as that," returned M. de Saint Senier, hastily; "only if he went to M. Vacheron and there was an unpleasant scene, do you not think that it would be well to avoid such a risk?"

"Yes, I do, and I will take measures to prevent it."

"May I ask how you will do that?" asked the suspicious Viscount.

"I was about to tell you. Shall you see Augustus to-day?"

"Yes, I am going to the club at four o'clock to introduce M. George Cézambre. Augustus will certainly be there."

"Well, then, tell him from me that on Monday or Tuesday I will retire the bill."

"What! By paying it?"

"By paying it in cash. My wife signed it for me in a moment of affection, when she could refuse me nothing, and no doubt she bitterly regrets having done so now. I will take no advantage of her. She has no doubt confessed her weakness to her father, who expects to have to pay up on the 15th of June, and I intend to give myself the pleasure of letting him rage and fume, and on the day of its maturity I will give him a surprise by showing him that I can do without him or his daughter."

"That will be excellent, but—see—! to-day is Wednesday, and on Tuesday next you will pay up three hundred thousand francs. It is an easy thing to say, but ——"

"Easier to say than to do, you mean. However, it will be done. If I had any doubt, I should not be so positive, and I trust that you are not going to ask me for an explanation as to my ways and means of doing it?"

"Your word is quite sufficient, my dear fellow, all my uneasiness has disappeared, and I look on you for the future as a model partner. And now let us talk of our business. You know that things are looking well. Snowflake's last few gallops at Mortcerf have been most satisfactory, and Harris, our trainer, is delighted. Mowbridge is to have the mount."

"Mowbridge told me yesterday that he could win the Produce Stakes by two lengths," said Gontran.

"Do you think that Mowbridge is all right?" asked Saint Senier, with his customary suspicion.

"He is as safe as any one we could get. He has ridden seventeen winners in England. Lord Winter guaranteed not only his skill, but his honesty, and what can you ask for, more than that?"

"Oh! nothing, certainly. I shall put my last coin on the colt, and I suppose you will do the same. It is an opportunity that we shall not get again for a long time."

"I shall have all that I am worth on Snowflake. I have already fifteen hundred louis on with Saffery, but that is a mere nothing. I shall wait for Sunday to go on a bu'ster, as they say."

"Take care. Snowflake is going up in the betting every hour. On the day of the race it will be five to one on him."

"I hope to get on at a better price than that, and I shall act so as to win a real pile. I may not ruin the big book-maker, but I will give him a squeeze, I can tell you."

"Well, I shan't go to work on so large a scale as you, but then I have not the same notions. But—and remember this is between ourselves—I can't help feeling astonished that William Oxwall, who is as fly as any of them, should lay the big sums that he has against our horse. If report is to be depended on, Snowflake's victory will cost him a million."

"The sharpest are taken in sometimes. But don't alarm yourself about him, he will have hedged, I expect. Who can say if he has not backed our horse with the other book-makers. The doings of these fellows are about as easy to see through as a bottle of ink."

"Oh!" returned Saint Senier, with a slight sneer, "Oxwall's ruin would be as much a matter of indifference to

me, as yours would grieve me. But let us make arrangements for our victory and let everything else go. You know our horse comes up this evening. He is in good hard condition, and the journey is so short that he will not be a bit knocked up. His stall is ready for him at Borne's at the Madrid."

"I know that, I shall go and see him to-morrow morning."

"And I, some time during the day with my wife, who has asked me to show him to her."

"I did not know Mme. de Saint Senier was so interested in animals," answered Gontran, with a sarcastic smile, "but of course you cannot refuse her that pleasure. But the affair is a serious one for me, and I intend to watch over Snowflake, for he represents a fortune to me. I suspect no one, but I distrust everyone. I have heard of bookmakers, who were interested in a horse losing a race, bribing the stableman, and a lad can very easily slip in a drug during feeding time. Snowflake shall not touch a morsel without my being present, for I shall sleep to-morrow at the Madrid, and shall be a good deal more in the stable, I expect, than in my bed."

"Ah, now you speak what I call properly, and my mind is at ease. I have no doubt of success, my dear Gontran, and I thank you for it in advance, for it will be to your watchfulness that we shall owe it."

"Do not thank me, old fellow; are not our interests the same? I am working for myself, as much as I am for you, and now I suppose you do not want to dissolve our little partnership?"

"Less than ever; besides, I have never thought seriously of it."

"Well, if you want to do me a favour, when you get to the club call up Augustus, you seem to have some influence over him—and get him to keep quiet until Tuesday."

"I will not fail to do so; but why don't you come to the club yourself?"

"Because I do not care about meeting your young friend from Mauritius; besides, I have a word or two to say to Oxwall."

"Farewell, then; put on the money, and act boldly. It is a certainty, and in three days you will not require M. Vacheron's assistance. I am going to my wife to try and persuade her not to come and see Snowflake; by Jove, if she were to caress him she would bring me ill-luck."

"Really, I should not have thought that Mme. de Saint Senier's caresses were so injurious to your interests," returned Gontran, with an irony which his friend affected not to perceive.

Sartilly turned towards the stables, where he hoped to meet the bookmaker. Up to the last he had hesitated ; for a few of the feelings of a gentleman still clung to him, and he had vaguely hoped that something would turn up to rescue him from the quagmire in which he was embedded, without his being compelled to have recourse to dishonourable proceedings. But after his conversation with his partner, he felt that he had no choice, and that delay would simply mean ruin.

He found William Oxwall in one corner of the arena, amusing himself by betting a few louis with men of his own stamp, just to keep their hands in. When Oxwall was not doing his business, he had all the air of an English gentleman, with even much more distinction than M. de Saint Senier, though the Viscount did all he could to assume the true Britannic manner and appearance. As soon as he perceived M. de Sartilly, he left his friends and came up to him. Gontran drew him on one side, and said shortly, "you asked me to give you a definite answer, and I bring it to you. You can go on—*I will do it.*"

"I congratulate you, Count," exclaimed the bookmaker. "To day you are my debtor ; on Sunday evening you will be my creditor, but not for long, for I pay cash, as you know. As for me, I shall have made my fortune."

"Let us first begin by settling the conditions. If Snowflake is beaten you will win a great deal of money, I know it for a fact, but what shall I gain ? As I stand at present, I shall lose thirty thousand francs, for which I have backed the horse with Saffery. That I see plainly. But if Snowflake does not come in first, I cannot say what horse will."

"I can give you an outsider that is now at sixty to one, and which I think has a good chance of winning, and that is Cash-on-Delivery. No one has taken any notice of him, and I should not be a bit surprised if he carried off the stakes, in the event, of course, of anything happening to Snowflake. A thousand louis, or even five hundred laid on this unknown colt, would bring you in a heavy sum, but of course I cannot be absolutely certain that he will beat the other ones that have been entered ; but as we are doing business together, it is necessary that your gains should be sure. I therefore propose to make a division ; that is to say, if I pull in two millions I will give you one, deducting from it the four thousand louis which you owe me. Does that seem fair to you ?"

"Yes, but when shall I have the money ?"

"Three or four days after the race. I have some wealthy customers who do not settle until the next day, but if you want anything on account ——"

"I want three hundred thousand francs directly after the race."

"Count, you shall have your three hundred thousand francs directly after the race is run," answered the book-maker boldly; "and if so much money will be troublesome to carry away, I will give you a cheque on Rothschild, who keeps my account. On Tuesday I can I think pay you the balance."

"Tuesday will suit me very well indeed," replied Sartilly, who had on that day arranged to retire the bill in the hands of the card-room waiter.

"Then we are agreed on all points?" asked Oxwall.

"One more question: how am I to know what sum our operation, as you call it, has brought in?"

Oxwall smiled a little contemptuously. "I could reassure you, Count, by saying that all arrangements like ours must be carried on with reciprocal confidence, for the law does not recognise them—indeed, it forbids them. There is nothing to prevent my breaking my word, and retaining the whole profit of the transaction, for you could not sue me before any court. Only if I did so, I should be a scoundrel, and I hope I am something better than that. I may not have many scruples, but I meet my engagements, and the more risky an arrangement is, the more honesty should there be in carrying it out."

"You are quite right—but——"

"There is nothing to prevent you, Count, from changing your mind, between this and Sunday, and completely ruining me by letting your horse *run on the square*."

"Running on the square" in the slang of the turf means to allow a horse honestly to do his best to win, and the expression was like the stroke of a whip to Gontran's pride.

"I know that you would not do such a thing," continued Oxwall, coldly, "and I trust to *your honour*. Your word is sufficient to me. You do not, however, trust to mine. This doubt on your part does not wound me in the least, and instead of being angry with you, I will endeavour to set your mind at rest. My books are always in order and are kept with clearness and simplicity, and I will show them to you after the race. You can go over them, and after you have satisfied yourself, and struck a balance, you will know exactly what amount I owe you. It appears to me that I cannot be more open than I am with you."

Gontran's head sunk on his breast, the flush of shame mounted to his cheek, for he was forced to confess to himself that in his discussion with the adventurer of the racecourse,

the one who had shown himself the best gentleman was not the Count de Sartilly.

"Good," said he abruptly. "I have never distrusted you, and you can have confidence in me. We shall meet at Long-champs on Sunday."

"Do you know, Count, how to make use of the grains in the little bottle?" asked the bookmaker.

"Yes—yes."

"And at what time to administer them. On the morning of the race, when the horse has had his last feed of hay. The grains must be put on his tongue, two or three only at a time otherwise he will reject them, and remember this can only be done in the absence of the lad who looks after him."

"I sleep to-morrow at the Madrid, the horse is going to Borne's stables."

"Very well, it will be extremely easy for you to send the lad off for a time on some pretext; then there is Mowbridge the jockey, I know him well, he is a very cautious, and excessively inquisitive, an excellent rider, but if he suspected anything, he would want to be paid for holding his tongue."

"I understand—good bye," exclaimed Gontran, who was anxious to get away from these bits of advice, which seemed to stir up the mud into which he had plunged.

"Good-day, Count," returned the bookmaker, "I have only one request to make. Your resolution, you say, is taken, but I must take my precautions. If by any chance, you should change your mind before the race is run, I shall have no cause of complaint, only, I hope that you will warn me in time."

"Such a thing will not occur."

"I believe you, but if by any impossible means such an event did take place, kindly take a note of my address. I reside 169, Avenue de Neuilly. I shall remain at home all day. On Sunday, I shall breakfast at home, and shall not leave for the course until one o'clock, so that you will have plenty of time to give me notice. A letter or a wire which will reach me at the last moment will be sufficient to give me time to turn round in. I shall certainly lose a great deal of money, for I have laid heavily against your horse, and given good prices, but even then I shall be able to hedge on the course. You do not, I suppose, desire to ruin me?"

"Certainly not. I understand you perfectly, and you can rely on me in any case."

"It is also understood that if Snowflake wins you will settle up with me without further delay, for I shall require all the money I can scrape together,"

"I shall see you on Sunday at your post," said Gontran,

"and shall tell you then that all is settled ; meanwhile I agree to your conditions." With these concluding words Gontran turned away, and made for the place of exit, for he was only too anxious to get away from the man to whom he had sold his honour.

There are some hardened criminals who enjoy the society of their accomplices, but fallen as Gontran was, he had not yet sunk to that depth of degradation.

CHAPTER XXII

THE LADIES' BATTLE

WHILST the conversation between Gontran and Oxwall had been proceeding, the former's respectable partner M. de Saint Senier had joined a group of sporting men who had gathered round the horses which were standing before the committee box. Every variety of amateur was represented in this collection of men who affected to be judges of horse-flesh. There was the county gentleman, heavily-built, with a velvetreen coat, and a cutting whip under his arm, with one eye on the horses, and the other on the ladies ; the old general officer with grey moustache, abusing the animals which he called "screws," and cursing the English terms used by his neighbour, a member of some sporting club ; and lastly, to complete the series, there was the gentleman who had never been across a horse in his life, and who understood nothing about them, but had come here because it was the right thing, and who was perpetually losing himself by using racing terms of the meaning of which he had not the slightest comprehension, but which he had caught up from the conversation of passing grooms and stablemen. There were ladies also who had come down from their seats, some escorted like princesses by men of their own class, rich, haughty, and noble ; and others under the protection of cavaliers of a lower standing ; young mashers and middle-aged men, who did not mind compromising themselves by being seen in public by the side of a pretty girl. The politic M. de Saint Senier was amongst the last ; he had caught sight of Diana de Ganges in one of the passages, and would certainly have offered her his arm, had she not already been leaning upon that of George Cézambre, whom he was to introduce to the club when the show was over. The time therefore to open a flirtation with the beautiful Diana would not have been happily chosen, the more so that the military competitions had just begun, and the jumping contest was

in full operation. Diana and George had placed themselves in the first row of the spectators, and were watching the proceedings, Diana, especially, with the greatest interest. Saint Senier, therefore, thought it would be best to wait for the end of the competition, and he drew back, without losing sight of the couple, and leant against one of the pillars that supported the stand. From the position he had chosen he could only see the backs of the spectators in the first rank, but in spite of that he soon recognised his wife, and the little Baroness de Réchampy, who had come close to the arena, and were only separated from Diana by a small group of gentlemen. Mme. de Saint Senier and the woman who had forfeited her position, could not at the present moment see each other; but if the gentleman moved, the ladies would at once come in contact, and a terrible storm would most likely be the result. A husband of another stamp would have endeavoured to lose himself in the crowd, but Saint Senier remained where he was, for he would not at all have objected to have witnessed from a safe distance an altercation between his wife, whom he cordially detested, and Diana de Ganges, for whom he had taken a great fancy. He had his wish sooner than he thought.

Diana, who did not know that she was within earshot of her ridiculous rival, did not hesitate to criticise all the officers as they passed before her. She addressed herself to George, but her voice was raised sufficiently high to reach the ear of Mme. de Saint Senier, and she spoke like a really qualified critic, for when at the house of the Sartillys she had been in the habit of riding every morning.

"He sits too stiffly," said she, "and oh, how badly he is dressed, with hideous regulation boots, and a switch instead of a whip, yet he took his horse over the fence without touching it. That one, hasn't a bad seat, but he sits a little too forward, and looks about too much; see there, he bows to some girl he knows; he has no style, decidedly none at all."

George was much pleased with these criticisms, and Diana, delighted at his amusement, began once more.

"Ah, that captain has breeding, and that is more than his horse has; he did the salute well. One can easily see that he did not learn to ride in the regimental riding-school, he must have had a pony to ride when he was five years old;" then referring to the officer who followed him: "Here is a giant! why even without his breast-plate he looks like one of the knights of old; and what a seat, he never moves, no more than if he was a statue, and when he comes to the fence he does not lift his horse until the last moment. There is at

least one noble lady here who ought certainly to fall in love with him, for she is fond of big men—our fine Viscountess !”

This little allusion to the taste of the Viscountess for the herculean style of men, was uttered in too high a key, and at the wrong moment, for the little knot of gentlemen had by this time almost entirely moved away, and as Diana spoke, she found herself almost face to face with Mme. Saint Senier. The last phrase was like a match applied to a powder magazine.

“I suppose that you are referring to me when you speak of the fine Viscountess ?” said Mme. de Saint Senier, spitefully.

“If the cap fits, you are welcome to wear it,” returned Diana, calmly.

Amongst men such an answer would have certainly led to a duel. With ladies of the “*half world*” of both high and low degree, a commencement of this kind would have promptly led to fisticuffs, but these ladies both of high birth and education, contented themselves with words, each one of which was as dangerous as a swordthrust.

“It seems to me that you like them young,” said the Viscountess, glancing at George.

“You don’t dislike them yourself. It was not your fault if M. Cézambre escaped safe and sound from your Tower de Nesle in the Rue Villejust,” answered Diana.

“What is that you dare to say, you vile hussy ?”

“I laugh at your abuse, Madame Potiphar.”

“Do you know that I can have you turned out of this place ; women of your class have no right here.”

“I am sorry that you haven’t brought your coachman with you to do so. I should have liked to have seen you walk about on his arm, but you are afraid to show him in public for fear some one should take him away from you.”

In the twinkling of an eye, the voices of the two ladies had risen to a key that excited general attention.

“Hulloa, what fun,” said one girl to another. “Here are two ladies from sweldom going to pull caps.”

Diana blushed as she heard these words and regretted that she had permitted herself to go so far. Since the allusion to the coachman, the Viscountess had remained silent, stifled with rage, and the battle stopped short.

Amongst the spectators there were those who presented a strange figure. The little Baroness, much scandalised, tried to put on an air of dignity, and prepared to make her escape. George, who was much annoyed, endeavoured to draw Diana away, and Saint Senier, who was annoyed at his wife’s making a spectacle of herself, but delighted that she had received so sharp a lesson, waited

until he considered that the proper moment had arrived for him to intervene. When Diana made her allusion to the coachman, he thought that the time had come, and stepping forward with the greatest coolness, he showed himself, and addressing his wife, said : " Will you take my arm, my dear Jeanne, and I will escort you to your carriage." Then as she hesitated, he added, " Madame de Réchampy will, I am sure, excuse you, for if you remain here any longer the heat which has already affected you will perhaps severely incommode you ;" then turning to George with a bow, he continued, " My dear sir, in an hour you will find me at the club, where you know I promised to present you to the gentlemen who elected you to-day."

The Viscountess at last made up her mind to take her husband's arm, who politely bowed to Mlle. de Ganges with a smile which plainly said, " My position as a husband compels me to remain neutral, but I am not at all angry with you for having given my wife a lesson." And he then left the building, pulling Mme. de Saint Senier after him. No one could have extricated himself more adroitly from an awkward position ; a fool would have made a scene ; an ill-bred man would have asked for an explanation, but the Viscount contented himself with cutting the thing short, and doing it in such a way as to profit by it afterwards. For the last two months there had been unpleasantnesses in his household which formerly had been a model of peace and quietness. Mme. de Saint Senier had permitted herself to make some remarks on his manner of living, and when he had taken upon himself to blame several things in her behaviour, his wife had retaliated. Had she not recently taken upon herself to advise him to dissolve his partnership with M. de Sartilly ? He permitted her to do as she liked as long as she did not interfere with what he did, and the present was an excellent opportunity for him to re-establish in his house a despotic form of government which was the only one that suited him. " My dear," began he, as he led her to the place of exit, " you have just been behaving like a fishwife."

" It was that vile girl who insulted me !" exclaimed the Viscountess.

" You should not have answered her. Happily no one of our own class was there to hear you. Madame Réchampy, your friend, is a woman of no position, and does not count, and I was able to put an end to this ridiculous scene. Let it pass this once, but do not begin again. Now, however, I have something important to say to you, which I beg you to listen to seriously. Since I married you, I left you entire liberty of

action. This, you have used, and also abused, but I am not going to reproach you with this ; only I warn you seriously that if you compromise yourself too much, I shall be obliged to take immediate steps. I have just heard allusions to certain things which I did not at all like. You understand me, I think. Very well, if it was satisfactorily proved to me that you had descended so low, I should certainly proceed criminally against both you and your lover. I trust that you will not force me to go to such lengths, but if I have to do so, endeavour to choose one that you will not have cause to blush for, when you are seated beside him in the dock."

The Viscountess was thoroughly frightened ; never had her husband spoken to her in that strain before, and she vainly asked herself the cause of this sudden fit of conjugal susceptibility. "And now," continued Saint Senior, calmly, "I am going to make my own conditions. I am most anxious not to have to occupy myself with what you do, but I intend to be perfectly free also, free to dispose of my person and my fortune, and if it pleases me to ruin myself or make myself conspicuous with any other woman, I will not permit you to make the slightest observation on the subject. And see here, if you wish to live on good terms with me, abstain from making the slightest attacks upon M. Cézambre. You will only lose your time, for I have taken him under my protection, and have had him elected a member of my club. Don't you interfere with him, and let his young lady alone. I also forbid you to mix yourself up with the conjugal troubles of our neighbour Sartilly."

On arriving at the place where the carriage was standing, M. de Saint Senior handed his wife in, stared at the coachman, who appeared very uneasy under his master's eye, and lighting a cigar, walked down the Champs Elysées to his club which was not far off. As he walked along he chuckled to himself at having so well applied the theories which he had formerly ventilated to Gontran ; after having given his wife her head for a little he had now put on the curb, and used the whip freely, and he was certain that for some time at least the Viscountess would not attempt to kick over the traces.

But he was still very doubtful as to the financial position of his partner. He did not believe in the existence of those resources which Gontran boasted that he possessed, and he placed but little reliance on the successes on the turf which were to set him on his legs again. The great point was, that the bill drawn upon M. Vacheron should be paid, and this he doubted, in spite of the positive assertion in the affirmative made by M. de Sartilly.

FICKLE HEART

VOLUME TWO

CHAPTER XXIII

THE PLAN OF DEFENCE

IF the bill were not met the Viscount would lose all, for Augustus had only discounted it on his guarantee, and because he had but to obey orders. The waiter certainly had money of his own, but he worked with M. de Saint Senier, and the noble gentleman did not hesitate to lend money on exorbitant terms to the members of his club through the introductions of one of the valets.

In fact, he was the real creditor of Gontran, and he did not wish to be so any longer.

Augustus, who had heard the reports concerning M. de Sartilly, had proposed to go to his father-in-law, and clear up the matter at once, but Saint Senier would not authorise him to do so until he had talked over the matter with his partner.

He was not satisfied with the explanations that he had received, and had now made up his mind.

He had no sooner reached the club than he sent for Augustus.

"There must be an end to this," said he; "you have the bill with you?"

"Yes, it is in my pocket-book."

"Very well, then take it at once to M. Vacheron, Rue de la Neva."

"I know the house—only suppose he won't see me?"

"You must make some pretext, for you must absolutely see him to-day, even if you wait for him in the street."

"I will invent some excuse, and see him."

"I do not think that you will have any trouble. The

man lives in very simple style, and is not denied to anyone. When you are ushered up you will accost him with the greatest politeness, and will explain that you have not come for the amount of the bill, which is not yet due, but you only have come, to know his intentions regarding it. You will point out that the largeness of the sum warrants your making this inquiry, and you will add that in your character of a man of business you have thought it right to address yourself to him as a former member of the Tribunal of Commerce."

"And suppose he says plainly that he won't pay?"

"You will tell him as plainly, that you are determined to sue Mme. de Sartilly for the amount. Then I warrant he will yield. Go, and come back as soon as you can. I shall await your return with impatience."

"But, my lord, forgive me—one must leave nothing to chance—suppose after having seen the bill, he says that his daughter's signature is a forgery?"

M. de Saint Senier bit his lip, reflected for a moment, and then replied: "In that case you will tell him that you will send his son-in-law into penal servitude. Now go at once."

Whilst Augustus proceeds on his errand, let us view the ground where he will operate.

Since M. Vacheron had recovered his daughter everything had changed in his abode at the Rue de la Neva. Certainly Valentine had not brought back gaiety and merriment with her, but the good old man was so happy to have his daughter with him once again, that in order to promote her comfort he altered all his habits, some of which had become almost second nature to him. He gave up his long walks which were so conducive to his health, and only went out with her when she wished, and then they did not go far, for his daughter since her marriage had lost the habit of walking, and much exercise fatigued her. He had proposed to buy her a carriage, horses, a country house, to take her to the theatre, into the country, to the seaside, to Switzerland, but nothing seemed to tempt her. Had he been able, he would have invented for her new pleasures, but he was deficient in imagination and experience in such matters, having always lived outside the world of Parisian amusements; and besides this, he could not fail to perceive that she had made up her mind to live a life of complete isolation; and in the end he had confessed that perhaps she was not wrong to do so for a time, and he resigned himself to await the period until Valentine's grief had calmed down, and until the talk which the rupture had caused had died away. He allowed that she must feel so abrupt a termination of her married

life, and, though he never met anyone belonging to the society in which Mme. de Sartilly had previously mixed with, he could not help knowing that the scandal must have been very great. But, after all, he knew that in Paris things are rapidly forgotten, and he hoped that Valentine would sooner or later console herself. He therefore redoubled all his attentions, and knowing how fond she was of flowers, he filled his rooms with them, and bore with the greatest courage the unpleasant sensations that the perfume caused him. Then he endeavoured to brighten her up by talking with her, but unfortunately his conversation was not of an amusing character, for he could only talk on business matters, which did not interest his daughter, or repeat recollections of his earlier days, which she knew by heart, and only too soon he saw that instead of amusing her he wearied her. As a substitute for his own incompetency he would willingly have called in some friends, but who could he invite? He had only kept up his acquaintanceship with some old business people, and his daughter would hardly appreciate their society. There was always Trévières, and he could talk easily and well on many subjects; but he, from motives of delicacy, kept in the background. He had heard of the species of elopement that had been organised by Diana de Ganges, and he had refused to take any active part in it, and since Mme. de Sartilly had been at her father's house he had only called once, and even then he had cut his call very short, to the intense disgust of the ex-contractor, who could not understand any such refinement of feeling on the part of his visitor. The same sentiment that had hindered the young engineer from calling often in the Rue de la Neva had prevented Valentine from urging him to prolong his visit. From equally praiseworthy motives Mlle. de Ganges kept away from her former friend. She only made her appearance at rare intervals, and carefully abstained from bringing George with her. She considered that she had done enough in rescuing Valentine from her unworthy husband, and that her interference would now do more harm than good. Like a clever woman, Diana felt that Mme. de Sartilly, living as she was apart from her husband, must not afford the slightest opportunity for ill-natured gossip, and that the acquaintanceship of a woman in her position would be most injurious to her. Perhaps in course of time the situation might change, but at present Diana felt that, living openly as she was with George Cézambre, it would be better for her to keep away from her old friend. Valentine had understood, or seemed to understand, that in her own interests she must not expect to

see too much of Diana, who would not be less ready and willing to be of service to her whenever the occasion required and to preserve a link of communication between them it had been arranged that Lisa, who was now definitely installed in the Villa des Primevères, should come every day to the Rue de la Neva, to convey intelligence between the two ladies.

Both father and daughter therefore lived a solitary life ; Valentine plunged in silent grief, and Vacheron as sad as she, and tortured by the most poignant anxiety as to his beloved child's future. Valentine seemed to think that matters might remain as they were for an indefinite period, but Vacheron knew only too well that sooner or later the affair would have to be settled in some manner, and he thought that the earlier this was effected the better it would be for all parties concerned. The only question was, should it be a judicial separation or a divorce, and of the two Vacheron was in favour of the divorce. It was also necessary that the Court should restore to the Countess, who had been married under settlement, the free administration of her property, ousting her husband from the position that he now held ; and the ex-contractor paid particular attention to this last point, for having as he had, every reason to hate his son-in-law, he had lost no time in consulting his solicitor, who had plainly told him that in either case the suit must be brought by Mme. de Sartilly, who had attained her majority more than a year before, and was therefore fully competent to plead against her husband without having to go through a third party. Vacheron had endeavoured to induce her to do this, but she had positively declined to do so, and had relapsed into a silence as depressing as it was inexplicable. Her father, who did not understand her exact position, asked himself if in the depths of her heart, there was not some wish tending to a reconciliation with Gontran ; but evidently this was not the case, for after a protracted silence she had at last spoken, and begged her father never to mention her husband's name to her again. Therefore she evidently wished to forget this unworthy husband entirely, and would never return to him again. This was a great point gained, and Vacheron did not despair of obtaining by degrees her consent to take legal measures to dissolve her union with Gontran. He had at first believed that his detested son-in-law would commence hostilities by legally summoning his wife to return to the conjugal roof, and if the case once came into Court, Vacheron had determined to make capital out of Valentine's refusal, who would certainly decline to return to her husband's house. But the Count de Sartilly had given no signs of life since his wife's departure, and was no doubt

glad enough to have regained his liberty without having to settle accounts with her, or his father-in-law. What use was he making of this liberty, and what was going on in the house that Valentine had deserted? Vacheron was entirely ignorant on this subject. He never saw anyone who moved in the same circles as Sartilly, and as for the house, he took care to give it a wide berth. He did not even know the real reason that had impelled Valentine to leave her husband's house in so precipitate a manner; she had only told him that she had fled to save herself from ill-treatment, but she had not told him in what it consisted, and he, only too happy to have her once again with him, had made no special inquiries; whilst Diana, who was better informed, had kept her promise to say nothing to M. Vacheron of the attempt to poison, nor had she mentioned it to either George or Lisa. The Countess alone knew that her husband was a villain, and even she, since quitting his roof, had sometimes her doubts on the matter.

Mlle. de Ganges was right, she was not entirely cured yet. One day, the same on which Diana had had her memorable quarrel at the horse show, Lisa made her daily call on Mme. de Sartilly, and found the father and daughter seated opposite each other in the drawing-room, which M. Vacheron's thoughtfulness had filled with flowers, and who, being unable to extract a word from his daughter, had commenced smoking his pipe, one of his old habits which the Countess permitted. He liked Lisa very well, and gave her hearty welcome. "Ah! there you are," exclaimed he, "and how are the lovers of the villa?"

"My master and mistress have gone to-day to the horse show."

"Very good, if that amuses them, but it would bore me awfully. I hate horses there, as well as anywhere else. Do you bring any news?"

"Nothing of any importance, sir; but in coming here I met Francis, M. de Sartilly's valet in the Avenue d'Eylau."

"Well, if you have nothing better to tell us than that——?"

"I spoke to him, and perhaps her ladyship would be glad to learn what he told me."

"And so should I too, especially if he told you what his master was doing."

"M. de Sartilly has in no way changed his habits. He rides as usual every morning, goes to the Bois for breakfast, dines at his club, and remains there very late. But Francis was present on the night when the Count came home after Mlle. de Ganges had persuaded the Countess to leave."

Valentine raised her head as though to listen. She did not know what had passed in her room after she had left it, and she was most anxious to know.

"Her ladyship will be very much surprised," continued Lisa, "but when the Count came home he thought at first that she was dead!"

"What!" exclaimed Vacheron. "Did he think that my daughter was dead? Then he must have done all he could to kill her."

"I do not know, sir," answered Lisa, "but this is what Francis told me. He was waiting up for his master, as he does every night, and was talking in the hall with her new maid, when the Count, who does not often return so early, came in. It was then about one o'clock."

"Happily she was far enough off by that time. What did he do next? Did he ask about his wife?"

"He began by sending off Francis, saying that for this night he would dispense with his services, and that he could go to bed; then he went up straight to the Countess's room. Florence remained below, and Francis was also still there, when M. de Sartilly called them from the top of the staircase. They went up and found their master in the little sitting-room, which leads into the bed-chamber, and he was knocking at the door, which he was unable to open, as it was closed from the inside. He asked Florence if she had helped her mistress to undress, but she replied that her mistress had told her that she had no occasion for her services and that she thought that she must have been in bed long since."

"Then he must have believed that Valentine was waiting up for him, do you see?"

"He said that he had knocked quite loud enough to have aroused his wife had she been asleep, and he began to strike on the panels again. But naturally as her ladyship was not there, no one answered. Francis could not understand it at all, but he says that Florence did not appear much surprised. The Count cried out, 'Something has happened! Was the garden gate carefully closed to-night? Some criminal may have got in, it is easy to reach her window. I must know what has happened. Break open the door!'"

"And they obeyed him?"

"Florence did nothing, but Francis snatched up one of the heavy dogs from the fireplace in the little sitting-room, those brass dogs of the time of Louis XVI., which weigh, I don't know how many pounds, and in three blows he broke in the door."

"My dear son-in-law must have been much surprised when he only found an empty room,"

"He rushed up to the bed, and found it empty ; for a moment he appeared thunderstruck, but all was the work of a moment. Then he perceived the open window ; he went to it—the ladder was still there leaning against the wall ! then he muttered, 'All right, I understand.' He was pale with rage ; then he turned round, and looked at the servants, especially Florence, with such a wicked glance, but she has plenty of pluck and did not seem to care a bit for him or anyone else. Francis says, that he thinks there is some terrible secret between her and the Count."

"A secret ?" said M. Vacheron.

"Yes ; and if one was to divulge it, the other would be in a nasty fix. There is one thing certain, and that is, that Florence never lost her presence of mind for a moment. There was a glass of water on a stand near the bed, Florence took it up. Francis thought that she was going to drink it ; but no, she only walked to the window, and threw the contents of it out into the garden."

"Did not Sartilly ask her why she took this precaution ?"

"No, sir ; I think he hardly noticed it, he was so overcome ; he looked everywhere, as if he was searching for something, and at last he discovered a large envelope, which had been placed on the little rosewood table upon which her ladyship used always to write. He glanced at the address, and put the letter in his pocket. Francis thought that it was a note that the Countess had left for her husband to tell him that she had gone away."

"Is this true ?" asked Vacheron, turning to his daughter.

"No," answered Valentine, in a stifled voice, "it was not a letter."

"At any rate," continued Lisa, "he kept the envelope, and doubtless he knew what was inside it, for he left off searching at once ; then he pitched the ladder back into the garden, closed the window, and went to bed : at least he went up to his own room after having said to Francis, 'Remember not a word to a living soul of what has passed here to-night.'"

"And Florence ?" asked Vacheron.

"He did not say a word to her ; at least at the moment. But next day, no doubt, he had it out with her, for she packed up her things, and left the house for good, and all."

"Yes ; her master had no further use for her," growled Vacheron. "The plot, whatever it was, was a failure. But Francis stayed on, I suppose ?"

"Yes, sir ; the Count could not do without him."

"Francis is his willing tool ; but I am astonished that he tells you so much, for he must know that you are on my daughter's side."

"And I have not hidden the fact. But Francis is in love with me. Her ladyship knows it, and when I hold up the sugar-plum he jumps to please me, like a dog. I have only to ask, and he is willing enough to speak."

"Has he told you what his master is going to do?"

"He does not know, but he thinks that M. de Sartilly is not very much grieved at what has happened, and that he will continue to lead the same life as he has done before."

"Has any lawyer or solicitor been to the house?"

"No, sir; not a soul has been to the house, not even M. de Saint Senier, his racing partner; and Francis says that there is a coolness between them. Her ladyship's apartments were shut up the next day, the broken door was mended, and the Count took away the keys: he has had padlocks put on all the windows, and on the Venetian blinds. It seems as if he were determined that her ladyship should never get in again. But before he shut up everything, he went through all the cupboards, and emptied every drawer."

"Good," exclaimed Vacheron, passionately. "That will be a fresh account for us to settle; and now, my good girl, just step down and have a chat with my servants, for I wish to talk with my daughter; do not go away, for perhaps I shall want you again presently."

Lisa left the room without another word, casting a look of sympathy on her former mistress, who was doubtless going to be rigorously questioned by her father, as soon as she was alone with him.

Vacheron began without a moment's delay. "So," said he, "I now know all about the scene which thou so carefully concealed from me. It is plain enough. Thy accursed husband expected on his return to find thee dead. It is as plain as a pikestaff; he thought that thou hadst drank the poison which he had had placed in thy way. Thou knewest it, and yet thou did'st not say a word to me; but now, at any rate, I hope that thou wilt make no further effort to defend this scoundrel, who wished to put thee out of the way in so cowardly a manner."

"Father," answered Valentine, slowly, "I have sworn never to see him again, and I will keep my vow. Do not ask me to do more. Do not ask me to condemn, or even to accuse, the man whose name I bear."

"Thou shalt bear it no more, for I trust that now that thou wilt sue for a divorce." Then, as the Countess made no reply, Vacheron burst out passionately: "Then thou hast returned to this system of obstinate silence, which drives me frantic. Take care how far thou pushest me. I do not wish my daughter to continue the wife of a poisoner, and I swear

that if thou refusest to divorce him, I will denounce him to the Public Prosecutor."

"If you do that father, you will simply kill me, for I should never survive M. de Sartilly's condemnation."

"Thou sayest his condemnation ; thou confessest then that he is guilty. I know it too, but I am not certain that justice can touch him. The criminal intention is evident, but the crime has not been actually perpetrated. Then how can we prove that thy husband was an accessory to it? That vile creature who poured out the poison for thee took care to empty the glass out of the window, and she will deny everything. That fellow Francis will not bear witness against his master ; in fact, he has no evidence to give. I shall be asked, besides, what thy husband would gain by thy death, and I should not know what to say. He is not thine heir, and as long as thou livest, he can get money from thee. In doing away with thee he would kill the goose with the golden eggs. The motive for the crime escapes me. I shall discover it, but——"

"You see that you cannot take the matter into Court. Spare me then this disgrace."

"If thou wishest to avoid it, tell me what thou intendest to do. Thou canst not remain in this position, and thou wilt not divorce thy husband, nor wilt thou see him again. What are thy intentions ?"

"My intention, but not my wish, is to purchase my liberty and my peace of mind by a pecuniary sacrifice."

"I do not understand thee."

"The Court will not be applied to, and there will be no scandal, hardly even a rumour."

"Then thou dreamest of an amicable arrangement with a man who has neither honesty nor honour? Who will be his guarantee that he will keep his promises to thee?"

"I will give him leave to enjoy the fortune you gave me, if he on his side will consent never to attempt to force me to live with him again."

"Such an undertaking would be null and void in the eye of the law and, besides, I repeat to thee, he will not consider any promise of his binding."

"I have the means of compelling him to do so. I will let him know that if he does not *I will revoke my will*."

At the word "will" Vacheron leapt from his chair.

"Thou hast made a will?" exclaimed he, "and in favour of that man?"

"Yes, I made him my sole heir."

"And this will is in his possession?"

"He found it on the table where I had left it, when I escaped by the window to seek shelter with you."

"Unhappy girl, it was thy death-warrant that thou signed. And just now I asked, what motive he had in having thee poisoned."

"Fortunately," continued Vacheron, after a short pause, "a will can always be revoked, and there is nothing to prevent thee executing another, but had'st thou died that night, as he hoped, he would have inherited all thy property, and the villain would indeed have made a splendid stroke of business. But now, begin by telling me the whole truth ; this idea of will-making did not come into thy head of itself. Thy husband first suggested it to thee ?"

"No, no," murmured Mme. de Sartilly, "he set me the example."

"What dost thou mean ?"

"He did the same, he made his will before I did."

"And what was he going to leave thee—his debts ?"

"His fortune. Nearly four millions."

"Four millions ! Had he stolen them ?"

"They came to him from one of his relations who had recently died in Russia."

"A man who had been a captain in the Royal Guard of Charles X. ?"

"Yes, how did you know that ?"

"At the time of thy marriage he spoke of this inheritance, which he declared must come to him, but I did not believe a word of it. Since then I made enquiries. The officer he refers to, has been dead eighteen months, and he died insolvent. Sartilly therefore has told thee an impudent lie, and I fancy that now thou perceivest the design of this base falsehood. It was a trap into which he knew that thou would'st fall, that thou wouldst believe in a will made in thy favour, and that thou would'st not be behind him in generosity. Is it not clear to thee now ?"

Valentine bent down her head, but did not reply.

"He knew thee well, he could fathom thy very soul. After having bewitched thee, he left thee alone long enough to make thy will, and afterwards he thought that thou would'st drink the poison. Remember what thy former maid has just told us. Canst thou not see, this miscreant, hoping to find thee dead, and precipitating himself into thy chamber after having broken in thy door, hurrying to thy bed, upon which he hoped to find thy corpse, and then seizing on the envelope in which thou hadst placed the will that thou hadst made ?"

"Enough, father, enough," cried the Countess, hiding her face in her hands.

"Ah ! now thou blushest at being the wife of such a villain. Wilt thou not now break with him ?"

"I have told you that I would never see him again."

"Thou hast said so, but I put no faith in thy words. How can'st thou think that I can believe thee, when thou wilt not sue for a divorce. Thou believest that thou hatest him because thou despisest him, but in thy inmost heart thou hast hopes of his repenting, and thou wouldst leave him the time to do so. Thy sad experience has taught thee no lesson, and on the day upon which he takes it into his head to play the part of a tender and affectionate husband, thou wilt forgive him."

"No, no, I swear to you never."

"The oath of a woman who loves, is of as much value as the pledge of a drunkard. Thou weepest, thou findest that I am too harsh. Yes, I am so, cruel to be kind, like the knife of the surgeon. When I tear from thy heart that fatal passion which is consuming thy life, thou wilt thank me for having cured thee, though my mode of action may seem cruel to thee now."

"*I am cured*, father, I tell you so again. He has filled my cup to overflowing. Scorn has come, you know it, and indifference will follow. I do not say hatred, for I have loved him too well to wish him harm."

"Good, now we are coming to something ; but until thou art under the protection of the law, thou wilt be at the mercy of this man, and until thou hast told him of the revocation of thy will, thou wilt remain under the threat of some fresh attempt against thy life. Wilt thou revoke thy will, mad woman, and wilt thou consent to sue for a divorce ?"

"No, I have explained to you what I will do."

"What an arrangement with a villain, with a gentleman who has lost all sense of honour, who respects nothing. Thou hast placed thy neck in a noose, and thou refusest to cut the cord. One of these days thy unworthy husband will come here armed with the full powers of the law, he will order thee to follow him, and thou wilt do so without a murmur."

"No, I will not follow him, nor will he take me away by force, and when you have listened to me, you will allow that I am right in wishing to remain in the position in which I am. What shall I gain by driving into a corner an unhappy man who has lost the last feeling of honour. If I take my case into court he will plead, do not for a moment doubt it ; and to defend himself, he will not hesitate to blast my character. He will prove that I left him suddenly, in the middle of the night. He will assert that I had a lover, and he will find plenty of persons to believe it. There will be a terrible scandal."

"A scandal which will recoil upon himself,"

"On me, more than on him. I have everything to lose, he nothing. He has drained the cup of degradation to the dregs."

"Ah ! at last thou see'st him as he is," exclaimed Vacheron, delighted to hear his daughter speak in these terms of M. de Sartilly.

"Yes, father, as he is, my last illusions have taken wing, and they will never return again. But it is for that very reason that I think he is capable of anything, and we should not exasperate him by reducing him to misery. How do you think he will live if we gain the suit that you propose to bring against him ?"

"It is a matter of perfect indifference to me."

"He will then shrink at nothing to continue his spendthrift existence, without which he could not live, and he will end by disgracing himself."

"All the worse for him."

"And for me, who am his wife. A divorce can change nothing, for I cannot resign myself to see the name that I have borne dragged through mud and mire. I should kill myself."

The old man trembled. He knew too well the character of his daughter, always ready to rush to extremes, and he felt that this was no vain threat that she uttered ; but he was not the style of man to haul down his flag at once. "Then," said he bitterly, "to prevent this fine gentleman from harming himself, we are to allow him to squander thine income, to wallow in his luxuries and his vices ; and we shall doubtless when he has run into fresh debt, settle for him, and go on paying again and again."

"No, we must simply treat him as I ask you to do. Get a written promise from him to abstain from all claim to marital rights, on the condition that we permit him to enjoy the revenue of my dowry. Such a declaration signed by M. de Sartilly, and produced in court if he attempted to violate his promise, would have the greatest weight with the judges, when I should, as I certainly should do in such a case, sue for a divorce."

"Thou consentest, then, to sue for one ?"

"Yes, if he fails in his promise, because then I shall have no other course open except to escape from him. But in that case only. Let us therefore first try the method that I have pointed out."

"He will agree to it, of course he will agree to it, he will sign whatever thou desirest, and he will leave thee at home for a time ; and then one fine day he will tell thee that he is in debt again for some gigantic sum, and that if I do not aid him, he will be compelled to force thee to return to him,"

"That will be arranged for in the agreement. We will begin by requiring him to furnish us with an exact list of his debts, and when he has done so, you will pay them——"

"Not while I live," cried the old man. "Dost thou wish to ruin me, and thyself too?"

"You will pay them, stipulating it is for the last time, and you will make him give you a receipt framed in such terms that he dare not re-commence again."

"On my honour, I believe that thou hast become mad. Make an agreement with such a man, give him up your income, and money in addition! But it is the height of extravagance that thou art proposing to me."

"It is but a precaution against the misfortunes that I see in the future, and if you consent to do what I ask, I swear to you, by the memory of my mother, that should this last attempt fail, I will enter a suit against my husband, and plead for a divorce."

"And in the meantime wilt thou revoke thy will?"

"Yes, and I will execute such a one as you consider best; but in it you must permit me to leave to the Count de Sartilly not my fortune, but sufficient to give him his daily bread, for if he survives me he will have nothing, and I do not wish him to starve, nor do you wish it either."

Vacheron made a gesture which signified, "I should not care;" and he was about to make further opposition, for his daughter's arguments had not convinced him, when his old servant came in and said in a mysterious manner: "Sir, there is a man below, who wants to see you on a most important matter. I told him that you were engaged with Madame de Sartilly, and he answered that it did not signify, indeed that perhaps it was all the better."

"What is his name?"

"I asked him, but he said there was no use in his giving it, as you did not know him."

"Tell him to go to the devil then, I don't see people whom I do not know."

"All right, sir. Oh! by the way I forgot, he said that he came from the Count de Sartilly!"

CHAPTER XXIV

A DOUBTFUL SIGNATURE

At the name of Sartilly both father and daughter exchanged a look of surprise, but they felt that they could not in the presence of a servant express their opinion upon this strange and unexpected visit. "Well," said Vacheron after a pause,

turning to his old domestic, "go and tell him that I will be with him directly, and beg him to wait for a moment. Come here again when I ring."

Then, as soon as he and his daughter were once more alone, he continued: "From the Count de Sartilly. I don't expect that his message is worth hearing. I have half a mind not to see him."

"You would be wrong," returned Valentine, eagerly, "he may be the bearer of some proposals."

"Unacceptable ones of course."

"That is what we must know; but above all do not let this man leave until we learn the business upon which he has come."

"As if I did not know it beforehand. But he does not wish to give his name; I expect Sartilly has sent me some man of his own stamp, some broken-down swell, who will try to bamboozle me. I know that I shall get in a rage and kick him out, and thou wilt have learned nothing."

"Make the attempt at any rate."

"Just as thou wilt; very well, I will go then, though I am convinced that it is utterly useless; but, at any rate, we shall get rid of this suspicious character."

"Why not see him here?"

"What, in your presence?"

"Certainly. I am as much interested in the matter as you are, since he insisted in coming in, even when he knew that I was here. Were I alone I should decline to see him, but you are with me, and I want you to hear what he has to say to me. You can answer him for me."

"Dost thou promise to approve of my replies, and not to contradict me before the man?"

"I promise."

"Then that is different, and I will give orders to admit him. After all it is as well to finish with him once and for all. When I have dismissed thy husband's representative, we will resume our conversation where we left off."

With these words Vacheron rang, and ordered his servant to show in the stranger. Vacheron expected to see in the friend of his son-in-law, some well-dressed spendthrift, who was prepared to discuss Sartilly's interests, and to assume a high tone with his plebeian father-in-law, and in this case he was determined to treat him as he deserved, and accordingly he assumed the air of a creditor who is about to receive a recalcitrant debtor. He drew himself up in an aggressive manner, with his head in the air, his brows bent, and a glacial manner.

Valentine did not assume the *pose* of an injured wife; she

remained seated, outwardly calm, though her bosom was racked by varied emotions, for this interview, to which her father had at her entreaties consented, might perhaps decide her future.

The pretended envoy from the Count de Sartilly entered the room, with his hat in his hand, and a servile expression on his face. Decently dressed in black, with a well-shaven chin and large red whiskers, his bow and manner announced at once his *status* as a domestic servant of some class or other, and Valentine saw directly what sort of a man he was. Vacheron, too, though not over clear-sighted; detected the man's position immediately, and at once relaxed the stiffness of his manner, and said, in a half-contemptuous tone of familiarity: "Oh! so you come from my son-in-law, do you? Are you in his service?"

"No, sir," replied the man, without appearing disconcerted; "I am employed in the club of which M. de Sartilly is a member, and I have not been sent by him, though I come about a matter that closely concerns him."

"A money matter, doubtless?"

"Yes, sir, and a very important one, otherwise I should not have ventured to call on you."

"Then my daughter, who is not interested in business matters, has no occasion to be present at our interview."

"Excuse me, sir, but her ladyship is deeply interested in the matter which I have come to lay before you, so much interested indeed, that I could conclude the business with her alone, but knowing that she is staying with you, I thought that I ought ——"

"Come to the point," interrupted M. Vacheron, "and be sharp about it. What is it all about?"

"This is it, sir. About two months ago M. de Sartilly had need of a large sum of money, of a very large sum, and he came to me for it."

"If you lent it to him, you have been very foolish."

"M. de Sartilly was recommended to me by one of his friends, the Viscount de Saint Senier, in whom I have the greatest confidence, and who induced me to make the advance."

"You are, then, a professional money-lender?"

"No, sir, I am a servant of the club, as I had the honour to tell you; but I have a small capital, and I try to place it out advantageously."

"That means," remarked Vacheron, "that you get thirty per cent. for your money."

"I do the best I can, sir; you who have been in business know that money is a merchandise, the value of which varies

with the supply and the demand. The proof of this is that the rate of exchange of the Bank of France rises or falls according to the tightness or easiness of the market."

"I think that money-lenders are all a set of rogues, and I do not want to listen to your theories on the subject of interest. You say that you have lent money to my son-in-law. How much?"

"Three hundred and fifty thousand francs," answered the card-room waiter, coolly.

Had he adhered to the truth he should have said three hundred thousand only, for the odd fifty thousand represented the ruinous rate of interest, but no one is obliged to criminate himself.

"What, do you possess such a sum?" exclaimed Vacheron, in amazement.

"Yes, sir, and even a little more, for I have accommodated other members of the club also."

"Well, you can say farewell to this lot, unless you like to go to the Viscount de Saint Senier, who advised you to lend it, and ask him for it."

"His recommendation had certainly great weight; but I should not have contented myself with that only, unless he had backed M. de Sartilly's bill."

"He took care not to do that I expect, for he knew that his partner was insolvent."

"Just so, and so I took my precautions, and I am going to tell you exactly the security that I asked for."

"I don't want to know it. You do not for a moment suppose, I imagine, that I am going to pay a debt contracted by M. de Sartilly, contracted without my authorisation, and even without my knowledge?"

"I know perfectly well that you cannot be expected to meet all the engagements entered into by M. de Sartilly, and I hope that you will allow that I have not been in a hurry to speak to you of this. The sudden change that has taken place in M. de Sartilly's domestic arrangements has decided me to do so."

"Explain yourself? I don't understand you."

"But it is most simple. Had it not been for recent events the security would have remained in my hands without a word being said about it, indeed it is still as good as ever, even though your daughter has left her husband ——"

"I tell you again that I do not understand a word of all this chatter. What security are you talking of?"

"Of a bill for three hundred and fifty thousand francs, due the 15th of June, which was given to me by M. de Sartilly for value received, minus the interest and discount."

"A bill, drawn on whom?"

"On you, sir; and it was arranged by your son-in-law that it should not be presented to you for acceptance until it fell due, and if I have come to you before it is——"

"On me!" exclaimed Vacheron, pale with rage. "Has he dared to draw upon me? He knew very well that I would not pay it, for I refused him the identical sum that you have been ass enough to lend him. So he tries to put pressure upon me, does he? Well, you may do what you like with him, and you may, if you choose, sue him in a criminal court, for I assure you that you are the dupe of a swindler."

The money-lender made no reply. He was watching Mme. de Sartilly, who had sunk back in her chair, and Vacheron, catching the direction of his eyes, saw that Valentine was on the point of losing consciousness.

Vacheron hastened to his daughter's side, murmuring, "Forgive me, I went too far, I forgot that thou wert here. I promise thee that I will say nothing further before this man regarding thy husband's conduct. But I must know the rights of this matter, so allow me to inquire into it closely."

"Do so," answered Valentine, recovering herself; I, too, want to know all."

"I was wrong to fly into a passion," resumed Vacheron, addressing Augustus, "for I have nothing to do with M. de Sartilly's affairs, nor am I the judge of his conduct; but it is my duty to tell you that I will not meet this bill that you have discounted so recklessly."

"Excuse me, sir, but I never expected you to take up a bill drawn by M. de Sartilly. I am not a child, and I know that he has nothing of his own, since his wife's property is settled on herself, and that if the bill is not met he will not be in a position to pay up."

"And if not him, who will do so, pray?"

"He has endorsed it, as a matter of form, but the bill is drawn by the Countess de Sartilly."

At this disclosure Vacheron almost fell backwards, whilst Valentine, overwhelmed with surprise, remained dumb, and seemed by her gestures to be protesting against this assertion. Her father did not know what to believe. "Why," asked he, "before discounting the bill did you not consult my daughter?"

"Because M. de Saint Senier said that such a proceeding would be injurious to his friend, and because I did not suppose that M. de Sartilly would commit a forgery."

"A forgery!" repeated Valentine, in the deepest anguish.

"Yes, madame, a forgery," said the card-room waiter; "if the bill is not met I shall be compelled to apply for a warrant against the guilty party, for in that case M. de Sartilly would have ruined me, and I would have my revenge on him."

"And you would do right," exclaimed M. Vacheron, permitting himself to be carried away by an impulse of indignation, which he speedily regretted, "for forgery is the vilest of crimes."

"The more so when it is committed by a gentleman in a high position, to the injury of a poor man like myself."

"Fifty years ago they hung forgers in England, and they were foolish to alter the law."

Valentine was a sad sight as she bent down her head and listened to her father's savage remarks, who did not look in her direction, and every instant her face grew paler and more melancholy.

"Happily," continued Augustus, "I shall not be obliged to proceed to such extremities, for I am sure that the Countess signed the bill, which at first I began to doubt. You, of course, are not obliged to meet it, nor is it you, sir, that I shall proceed against in the Tribunal of Commerce. But I will have my money. The fortune of the Countess de Sartilly is perfectly free as it is settled on herself, it is to her then that I shall apply for payment, and I do not think that she will permit a scandalous trial to go on which she can so easily avoid." This was a plain straightforward declaration, and at once showed the ex-contractor the real position of affairs. There were two sides to the question, either the signature was a forgery, or else Valentine had had the weakness, or been forced by her unworthy husband to sign it. This was the point to clear up, and Vacheron did not hesitate for a moment longer. "Have you the bill with you?" asked he.

"Certainly, sir," returned Augustus, courteously; and as he spoke he drew it from a well-worn pocket-book, and handed it to the old man, who examined it with an experienced eye. It was signed Valentine Vacheron, Countess de Sartilly, and bore the endorsement of Gontran de Sartilly. The two signatures did not seem to have been written by the same hand, but the old man was not at all sure of the authenticity of his daughter's, who wrote as she had been taught at school in the English fashion, and all English handwritings resemble each other. To put an end to his doubt he had only to question Valentine, and so holding the bill before her eyes, he asked her shortly, "Didst thou sign this?"

She lifted her eyes reddened with tears to her father's face, and in them he could read a prayer not to persist in his question, but he was pitiless.

"Is this thy signature?" repeated he.

"Yes, it is mine," answered she at length, with a violent effort. She expected an outburst of rage, and a volley of reproaches, but she was deceived. M. Vacheron was coarse from his want of education, but he had a heart, a nobler heart than many a titled gentleman who makes a great parade of his feelings of honour and does not pay his tradespeople. The usurer had heard Valentine's reply, and Vacheron would have spent all he possessed sooner than the fellow should be able to say that the daughter of a self-made man had not met her engagements. "That is sufficient," said he; "the bill falls due on the 15th of June, I see."

"Yes, sir," returned Augustus; "you have still fifty days to pay it in."

"Will you permit me to take it up in advance?"

"Certainly; I will even take something off the interest for the time it has to run; that is to say, from the 15th of April to the 15th of June."

"Of course I expect you to do so; at what rate have you calculated the interest, at twenty, forty, or fifty per cent.?"

"The rate matters very little. I am ready to hand over my bill to you for three hundred and twenty-five thousand francs, money down."

"The real value given was three hundred thousand francs. The bill is dated the 15th of February, we are now at the 24th of April, your money has therefore been advanced for two months and five days. Twenty-five thousand francs for that time is very little, is it not?"

"I assure you, sir, that——"

"Don't assure me of anything, but let us conclude the matter. You will take a cheque, I suppose, on the Comptoir d'Escompte?"

"One of your cheques, most certainly, sir."

Without another word Vacheron drew from his pocket a cheque-book which he always carried about him, and sitting down at the table wrote an order for the enormous sum, and handed it to the money-lender.

A gleam of delight passed over the man's vulgar countenance, but Vacheron cut short his thanks by taking him by the collar and turning him out of the room, a proceeding to which the rogue offered no resistance, for he was over-joyed at the success of his mission.

Scarcely had he left than the old man folding his arms turned to his daughter, with the words, "And now for us

two. I have met this bill because I would not permit my daughter to be sued before the Tribunal of Commerce, on which I sat as a judge for three years. I have some regard for my name, I have, and I cannot for a moment believe that thou hast committed so shameful an action as to join with thy husband in an attempt to ruin thy father, or, at any rate, to compromise him. I could even have forgiven thee for having signed this bill hadst thou told me of it, even after thou hadst done so ; but to leave me in ignorance of it, to allow me to run the risk of its being presented at maturity, when I might have refused to take it up, shows more than folly ; it discloses a want of heart, and if thou lovest me no longer, if thy insane passion for thy husband has stifled all thy affection for me, thou at least owest me some respect."

Valentine burst into tears, and her sobs prevented her from speaking.

"Thou weepst," said Vacheron, "and it is time that thou shouldest do so. Thou shouldest have shed tears on the day on which thou signed, and have come to me to tell me of it. I would then have taken thy fine husband by the throat and forced him to give up his plunder. It is too late for that now, but thou canst explain to me how it was that that villain forced thee to act as his accomplice. Try to justify thyself ; but the scene is almost before mine eyes. The bill was signed upon the very day on which thou camest to ask me for the three hundred thousand francs, which I refused. When thou toldest him this, he threatened thee, and perhaps ill-treated thee. Was it not so?"

"He got into a violent passion," said the Countess in a low voice, "and told me that all was over between us, and that henceforth we were to live apart."

"And to regain his love thou yielded. Of what stuff art thou made, to cringe and fawn for the caresses of this mighty nobleman, whom thou servest as a slave ? Canst thou not understand that by putting thy neck beneath his feet thou hast only earned his contempt. He must have cast a spell upon thee. Hast thou not read in the papers of the experiments that have been tried at the Salpêtrière on hysterical patients ? That man would place a dagger in thy hands and say to thee : Plunge this to-night into thy father's heart, and thou wouldst do it, even as the unhappy creatures in the hospital obey the dictates of their doctors. They have invented a word for it, they call it the suggestive process !"

Vacheron must have indeed have been in a state of exasperation to have gone to such lengths, and to have made use of scientific terms which were not familiar to him. He soon however saw that he had strayed from the question

which was not one of the disposition of his daughter. "Come," continued he, "answer me ; what has he done to thee ? What unworthy means did he adopt to obtain thy signature from thee ?"

"None," sobbed Valentine.

"What, none ? thou didst not sign, I suppose, when thou wert asleep. Then thou didst sign of thine own free will ?"

"No," answered the Countess in a suppressed voice.

"Dost thou mock me," cried Vacheron, "hast thou sworn to drive me to the end of my patience ?"

But as his daughter still obstinately insisted on remaining silent, he at last understood her true reason, and an attentive glance at her sad and wearied face taught him the truth in a moment.

"The signature is not thine ?" exclaimed he, grasping her by the arm, "thy husband has forged it ?"

"I cannot say," stammered Valentine, "but I can swear that it is not mine."

"Why then didst thou say it was thine just now ?"

"I could not deny it before that man."

"Thou couldst not ! say rather that thou wouldst not confess to him that the Count de Sartilly was a forger ?"

"You are right, I would not do so."

"And thou preferrest to let me pay three hundred and twenty-five thousand francs to prevent this villain being sent to penal servitude."

"Yes," replied Valentine, firmly ; "and I am sure that you would have paid it, even had you known that my name had been forged."

"Thou deceivest thyself," answered Vacheron, coldly, "and the proof is that I will to-day apply for a warrant against the scoundrel."

"You will not do that, father ?"

"Why not, pray ?"

"Because, as I have already told you, if you do I will kill myself."

"Kill thyself, because this man meets with the punishment that he deserves ?" exclaimed Vacheron, "thou must be perfectly demented."

"I am almost so," answered Valentine, with the calmness of despair, "but I swear to you, that if you apply for a warrant against M. de Sartilly, whom I despise as much as you do, you shall not find me alive by night-fall."

"Unhappy girl, dost thou wish me to die of grief ?"

"I wish to prevent you from acting in a hasty manner which you will regret later on. For in endeavouring to strike your son-in-law, you will only wound your daughter,"

"Then thou asserdest that I ought to hold my tongue. This rogue has robbed me, plundered me, swindled me. I shall have paid an enormous sum for him, and he will laugh at me as he has laughed at thee, and all will be over until he begins again."

"No, father, all will not be over, he will know that you have spared him, he will know where you could have sent him had you not pitied him——"

"It is thou, that I shall pity, if I decide to spare him. But he will not be grateful, and he will look upon my weakness as an encouragement to swindle me again, and will by degrees get all that I possess out of me."

"He will not dare to do so, for have you not in your hands the proof of his crime, and it rests with you to use it for his ruin."

"Yes, I have the bill with the forged signature certainly and I have but to show it—but what good would that be. Thou art quite capable of asserting that thou hast signed it, and I do not see how I can benefit by keeping it in my pocket-book."

"You will gain this, that you can impose conditions on him to which he must submit."

"What conditions?" asked Vacheron, impatiently.

"Have you forgotten that before this man came in you were urging me to sue for a divorce?"

"No, no more than I have forgotten that thou utterly refusest to do so, for thou desired to remain the wife of a cowardly rogue."

"I simply desired to avoid a scandal which would injure both of us, but I more than ever wish to regain my liberty. You are now in a position to force M. de Sartilly to comply with our conditions."

"There thou goest again with thy conditions, but, mad woman that thou art! dost thou not see that he will sign all thou askest: signatures are quite in his line, he has forged thine and he will not stop there, and thou wilt remain at his mercy as thou hast ever been."

"Not so, he will be at ours."

"No, I have a weapon against him, but it is a useless one, since thou threatened to kill thyself if I make use of it, and thou knowest that I dare not do so."

"Listen, father, do you put faith in my oath?"

"I do, and that is why I have yielded. I love thee too much to risk losing thee."

"Then you can believe the one I am going to make. I swear to you by the memory of my dead mother, by my honour, by the love that I have for you, never to intervene

again between you and M. de Sartilly if he fails in his new engagements."

"What engagements? To leave thee free, not to force thee to live with him again—a fine step in advance that, and in exchange thou wilt leave him to enjoy all thy fortune? He will be quite satisfied with that, I am sure."

"I shall even require more than that."

"What is it?"

"That he shall leave France for ever."

"He will promise, he will go away, and he will come back."

"Should he do so, you shall deliver him up to justice, and I will be the first to ask you to denounce his crime, and you can let him know that I will never plead for him again, if he breaks his promise this time."

"There is more reason in this proposition than in thy former one. For it is certain that if the Count de Sartilly goes to the other end of the world I shall be freed from all immediate fear for thee; but people come back even from there; only it is a matter of time. But he will never consent to leave. Thou hast told me thyself that he cannot do without his Parisian life, and upon what could he live out there?"

"On my income, as he does here. He shall receive an annual stipend equal to the dividends on my dowry, an income which he shall draw as long as he is abroad, but which shall cease the moment that he again sets foot in France. This agreement shall be drawn up, and you shall tell him verbally that you hold the proof of his crime, which you will make use of on the first infraction of the agreement."

"Three hundred thousand francs a year to get rid of a villain that ought to be transported to Nouméa."

"Has he not always had it, and yet tortured me," said Valentine, bitterly. "I shall be much better without it."

"I would give double that sum to see thee happy," cried Vacheron, overcome by emotion, "and if I were sure that thou wouldst not regret this man who has robbed me of thy heart——"

"Never," answered the Countess, energetically.

"I would fain believe it, but where wilt thou live? I know that Sartilly cannot take away the house in the Avenue d'Eylau, but——"

"I would not for the world live in it again. There are too many sad recollections connected with it. You shall sell it, and I will live with you."

"Sell it, ah, I don't know how that would do, real pro-

perty in settlement—the absence of the husband—but we will think of that later on ; thou shalt let it, or not let it, as thou pleasest. What does anything signify so long as thou dost not quit me again. Still I believe that thy situation will be a more painful one than if thou wert divorced, as thou mightest easily be now, for no Court would refuse to grant a divorce to a forger's wife, then thou mightest marry again. At thy age it is hard to live as a widow, when thou art not one. But if thou hast the courage to live like that—— ? ”

“ I am steadily resolved to do so,” answered the Countess, “ unless, indeed, M. de Sartilly, by breaking the agreement forces me to seek the aid of the Court.”

“ If thou dost so, I hope that thou wilt marry Henri Trévières, but that is looking too far ahead. We must go to work at once. Thou hast ended by convincing me no sacrifice of money is too great to free thee from thy husband.”

“ There will be another before his departure.”

“ The deuce, it seems however, that we have paid something already, we have paid that bill, and—— ”

“ It is too much, a great deal too much, but so that it may not be money wasted, we must be prepared to do more. I believe that he has other debts, and he will put them forward as a pretext against his leaving. He will say that he cannot deal with my settlement, and that not wishing to leave any creditors behind him he is unable to leave Paris, and he will remain there. Give him a sum down to settle his affairs.”

“ Not an unlimited sum though,” said Vacheron, “ why he would drain me dry. I have already paid three hundred and twenty-five thousand francs, let us say two hundred thousand more, that will be over half a million. I can't and won't go beyond that.”

“ I think that two hundred thousand will be enough.”

“ That is lucky,” replied Vacheron with an uncomfortable smile, “ and now how are we to commence the negotiation. A shameful negotiation in every sense of the word. I can't carry it out ; if I met the man I think that I should strangle him.”

“ You can write to him.”

“ In what terms ? ”

“ Shall I dictate the letter to you ? I have it all in my head.”

Vacheron had not expected to find his daughter possessed of so much firmness, evidently she was anxious to put an end to all relations between her husband and herself, and this looked well for the future.

“ Very well, I am willing,” and sitting down at the table he prepared to write,

"Remember," said Valentine, "if you have any fault to find with what I say, stop me at once." And she began as follows :—

"SIR,—A bill has just been presented to me for three hundred and fifty thousand francs, to which you had forged your wife's name. I paid it in her presence, and though I knew that it was a forgery, I allowed the person who brought it to think that all was regular. Believe me that I have not acted thus out of any feeling of kindness to you. I know all that you have done, and all that your wife has suffered through you. I know even what took place in your house on the night when she sought refuge in mine—ah, do you understand me? I could, therefore, easily bring you before the Criminal Court *as a forger at the very least*. I do not do this, to avoid dishonouring publicly the name that your wife bears, but I shall yet do so, if you do not at once submit to the conditions that I propose to you, or if after having agreed to them you do not carry them out. You must quit France and never return to it. Do not object. Your exile shall be made pleasant to you. Whilst abroad you shall continue to draw the income derivable from your wife's settlement, and if you require money to settle your affairs before leaving, I will place at your disposal a sum of two hundred thousand francs, which will be handed to you when you have signed the agreement, which I shall require to be executed to-morrow, if you are prepared to accept it. But it is absolutely necessary that this agreement should be clear and distinct, and contain a formal promise to leave the country for ever. You must leave also immediately. I grant you a week, not a day longer. On these terms, my daughter will refrain from suing for a divorce which, as you are aware, she could obtain without difficulty, and which would take away from you the power of enjoying the smallest portion of her revenue. Do not forget that on your refusal, or on the smallest infraction of the agreement, I will hand you over to the criminal authorities. I shall not write again, and shall expect your answer to-morrow."

"Capital," exclaimed Vacheron, "is that all?"

"Sign it, and I will add a postscript," and, taking up the pen, Valentine added, "I approve of this letter, and I swear that I will join heart and soul with my father in handing you over to justice, if you do not leave France, or if you ever return to it."

Vacheron clasped his daughter in a fond embrace.

"Who will take this letter, and who will bring back the reply? It is a delicate mission, which cannot be confided to anyone. It must be delivered to him to-day, for I have

insisted on an immediate reply, and all must be concluded by to-morrow ; for look you, my girl, if there is any delay, I may perhaps change my mind, for it is hard to lose two hundred thousand francs after having already made so great a sacrifice."

"Do you regret them, when you know that they will save me?" asked Valentine, holding out her hand to her father, who almost crushed her slender fingers in his grasp.

"Oh, no! and I never yet tasted the pleasure of being rich, richer than you can imagine. For the last ten years I have made nothing but good investments, and my money has almost doubled itself. What use are my millions to me, but to spend, so, as to save thee from trouble, and unhappiness? They are all thine, make use of them as thou wilt. When I think that if I were a poor devil I should have been unable to have defended thee against this wretch, but then hadst thou been poor, he would not have married thee. As he spoke, Vacheron cried like a child. His heart was filled with joy, the joy of having recovered his daughter again, and the knowledge that she would ever remain with him ; for he now began to believe that she was cured of her insensate passion for her abominable husband, from whose clutches he had rescued her."

"But," continued he, wiping his eyes, "I am losing my time in congratulating myself, when I ought to be acting ; so let us return to the last point. Who shall take the letter? Dost thou know anyone to whom we could entrust it?"

"Yes, father, to Lisa."

"Thy old maid?"

"I am certain of her fidelity, her discretion, and her intelligence, and I know that she will carry out the commission properly."

"Thy husband has dismissed her, and may refuse to see her."

"She will know how to prevent that. Francis will assist her."

"What, another domestic? Thou countest too much on these servants."

"I count upon Lisa's devotion to me, and upon her cleverness. But of course I shall not tell her the contents of the letter, and she is quite incapable of opening it."

"That I can believe, but thy husband will make her talk."

"No, he will not even endeavour to do so ; and besides, should he question her, he will not get her to say much. She is wonderfully clear-headed, and catches a meaning almost before the words are spoken. She is here at hand. I will tell her what to do, and she will do it exactly. Besides we have no choice, and we must not lose any time, for I too may change my mind."

This half-threat made Vacheron agree at once, for he dreaded nothing so much as a renewal of his daughter's affection for Gontran. "Thou art right," answered he. "I will close the letter. Where shall I address it to?"

"To the house ; if M. de Sartilly is not at home, Lisa will find him, and she will not come back without getting a reply, even if she has to go to him at his club, where he is always to be found at five o'clock."

Her father rang, and the old servant was told to send up Lisa, who almost immediately made her appearance. "You can do us a great service," said the Countess; "here is a letter which must be taken to M. de Sartilly at once, you must go with it, and give it into no hands but his."

"Madame can be easy on that subject."

"M. de Sartilly will no doubt ask you, who sent you. You will answer that you come from my father, and you will wait until M. de Sartilly has given you a written reply, which you will bring back to me at once," continued the Countess, with a strong emphasis on the last word.

"I understand your ladyship, perfectly."

"I am sure you do. Here is the letter, take a cab to go quicker, and try and be back here in an hour."

"I shall be here earlier I hope," returned the maid, as she left the room.

This plain short conversation, completely satisfied Vacheron. Evidently Lisa was a woman of some tact and talent, another would have wanted to know too much, whereas Lisa went straight to work without a word, and he felt that he could trust her. Besides, the letter that he had sent would compromise no one but his son-in-law, even if it did not go to the right address. Nothing remained for him but to find the money after Sartilly had signed the agreement ; and this he was prepared to do, though his soul revolted at giving so much money to a man he hated. As for Valentine's former maid she was delighted at the idea of being useful to the Countess, for she knew that in serving her, she also served Mlle. de Ganges, who wished for nothing so much as to release her friend from her villainous husband.

Lisa without exactly knowing how things were going, had partially guessed at what had happened. She had seen Augustus in the ante-room, and had at once detected that he was some kind of a lackey, and had imagined that he had been sent to collect a debt due by the Count de Sartilly, and that M. Vacheron had written him a letter on his daughter's part telling him that she would never return to him again.

CHAPTER XXV

A VILLAIN'S HONOUR

INSTEAD of taking a cab, which might have been stopped at the gate of the house, Lisa started across the Park Monceau and reached the Avenue d'Eylau in a quarter of an hour, when she met Francis, who was lounging about outside, and who still retained his passion for the pretty waiting-woman. Lisa came up to him and in an easy manner, said, "I must see the Count at once."

"Yes, my dear," answered the valet, trying to throw an amiable expression into his face. "But he is just going out; you can see his cab waiting for him at the door. What do you want with him?"

"That is nothing to you, my boy. I want to speak to him that is all, and I was afraid that the porter would not let me go through, for I suppose that he has had orders about me; but, my dear Francis, if you will smuggle me through, I will not be ungrateful."

"Yes, I know all about that; since you have been with that young woman of the villa, you have been all promises, and no payments, I certainly never expected you to learn virtue there."

"I will keep my promise this time, let me come in with you, and then the porter will say nothing."

"And suppose the Count turns me off?"

"I will find you a better place; it won't be difficult, for your master is hard hit under the wing, and won't be able to hold his own in Paris much longer."

"I can easily believe that," muttered Francis, "but I want to stick to him as long as I can, and I run the chance of losing my place for the sake of your pretty face. However, since you promise to recompense me, come along."

Lisa did not delay any longer, and escorted by the valet got safely past the Cerberus of the gate. Halfway to the house, Francis said, "And now, Miss Lisa, go on by yourself. When you have done with the Count, perhaps you will do me favour of accepting some bock, or a glass of chartreuse—I shall wait for you at the cafe over the way."

Lisa parted from her lover and thought no more about him, When the Count perceived her, he frowned angrily, and instead of stepping into his cab, came up to her. "What are

you doing here?" asked he harshly, "I had forbidden you to come in."

"I know that," returned the waiting-maid coolly, "but I have brought you a letter."

"From Mlle. de Ganges?" asked the Count, eagerly; "Give it to me."

"No, I do not come from her, this is from M. Vacheron."

"Ah! you are in his service now?" asked the Count, with a suspicious glance.

"Not at all, I was at his house by mere chance, and he asked me to give it to you, with orders to wait for an answer. Here it is."

Gontran was much surprised at receiving a communication from his father-in-law, and hesitated for a moment, then he took the letter from her hands, opened it, and read it. He had expected to find some sort of a declaration of war, the announcement of an approaching suit in the Divorce Court, and his surprise was intense when he found that it contained proposals of peace, of a much more advantageous character than he had dared to hope for. There was however some gall mingled with his pleasure. The forgery had been discovered, and Vacheron threatened him with a criminal prosecution, and hinted that he was acquainted with some other crime, which the law punishes with death. This announcement might well cause Sartilly some uneasiness, but he soon made up his mind that neither his wife or his father-in-law would attempt to send him either to the scaffold, or to New Caledonia, so that he speedily set his mind at rest regarding that portion of it. It was decidedly his interest to accept the arrangement that was proposed, the more especially as it offered him ready money of which he had urgent need. Exile was a bitter pill to swallow, even at the price of an income of three hundred thousand francs, but he had a week to decide in, and his financial position might change greatly in that time. "You were told to wait for an answer?" asked he, of Lisa, who was observing him stealthily.

"Yes, sir, a distinct order," replied she, boldly.

Gontran tore a leaf out of his pocket-book, and handed it to her, after having scrawled upon it these words: "I accept; I will communicate with you to-morrow by twelve o'clock, it is an understood thing that it is to be cash down."

"There," said he, handing it to Lisa. "Give that to M. Vacheron, he will understand it," and without giving Lisa the time to open her mouth, he sprang into his cab, and calling out to the coachman, "To the club," drove off, leaving the maid only half-satisfied with the result of her embassy.

M. de Sartilly had a motive in going at once to the club; he doubted yet whether M. Vacheron had paid the bill, and he was surprised that the card-room waiter should have ventured to call upon him before the time for which it had to run had expired, and he desired to find out exactly how matters stood. As for any remorse, he had not a shadow of it. As for any regret, and promises of amendment for the future, and vows never to put himself in so shameful a position again, he never thought of such things. He was only pleased at having been extricated from a portion of his troubles as though by a miracle, and the only conclusion that he drew from this fortunate occurrence was that all would end well. From the life that he had led, Gontran de Sartilly had forced himself to believe that the world, and all its inhabitants, had only been created to pander to his passions, and interests, and that the man of strong will, who was not troubled with any scruples, was a sort of king on the face of the globe, the more especially with both birth, and honour. He trampled on what he called prejudice; and to gratify one of his least caprices, he would have sacrificed twenty women like poor Valentine. He held certain ideas which he had imbibed from his earliest childhood, the ideas of an aristocrat who believes that he is free to do what he likes, except to endure an insult, or to lose the respect of his equals. Little cared he what a man like Vacheron thought of his honesty, as long as Vacheron kept his ideas to himself, and as long as the society in which he lived considered Gontran, Count de Sartilly, as an irreproachable gentleman. He had taken advantage of his wife's weakness in a most unworthy manner, because he was certain that she would not complain, but it was not until he had been driven to the last extremity that he had agreed to the conditions imposed upon him by Oxwall, the bookmaker, who could by a word, have him warned off the course as a defaulter, and get him cut by the society in which he had been in the habit of moving.

All that Gontran feared was to *lose caste* as the Indians term it, whilst the Chinese say to *lose countenance*; and for this reason he regretted having entered into a turf swindle, now that he would soon be in a position to pay his creditors, Oxwall included, without drugging the horse.

As he read the letter of his good old father-in-law he already sought for some means to break off his degrading connection with the bookmaker without compromising himself too much. This however was not an easy matter, for Oxwall might revenge himself by relating the history from beginning to end. His first business then was to ascertain whether the three hundred thousand francs had really passed

from his father-in-law's bankers into the hands of the usurious waiter. On arriving at the club he came across M. de Saint Senier, who was showing George Cézambre over it, after having introduced him to several of the members. Gontran bowed coldly to the young Creole, who seized the opportunity to take leave of his proposer, whom he had only allowed to patronise him at the express wish of Diana de Ganges.

Gontran left alone with Saint Senier, noticed that his friend's manner was different from what it usually was, he smiled, he rubbed his hands, and yet he seemed a little embarrassed. "Well," said Gontran, "what is the matter with you, "do you already regret having brought here this fine-colonial bird who pleases the ladies so much."

"On the contrary I am delighted, he does not dislike baccarat, and will be an excellent recruit for the table, which is beginning to languish a little ; but I have something on my mind, something that I hardly dare tell you——"

"Dare everything, my dear fellow, and go on."

"Well then here it is ; just imagine that animal, Augustus, in spite of all that I could say to him, persisted in going to your father-in-law's, and showing him the bill signed by Madame de Sartilly six weeks before it fell due. It is really too bad of him !"

"He wished no doubt to know if I had forged my wife's name."

"No, I do not think that that was his reason, he was only afraid that M. Vacheron would tell him that he did not intend to honour his daughter's signature."

"Well, what happened ?"

"An extraordinary thing. M. Vacheron paid upon the spot without any difficulty."

"He is a good father," answered Gontran coldly, "but I will speak pretty plainly to master Augustus, for I cannot permit a man of his class to doubt my word. He had promised to keep over the bill until the 25th of June, and I told him that I would retire it myself before that date."

"Never mind, you must forgive him, he has not done much harm after all, and you can make better use of your money. It appears that Mme. de Sartilly was with her father, and that M. Vacheron did not fly into a passion with her. Everything went off as pleasantly as possible."

"I should have been much astonished had it not done so."

"Yes, of course you know M. Vacheron better than I do, but I confess that I was very uneasy, not of course, on the authenticity of the signature, but as regards what line of conduct your father-in-law would adopt. He must be awfully

wealthy, for a man does not often pay a sum like that without a gasp, and to take it up at once, was wonderful."

"Well, we need say no more about that, you have other matters to talk of to me."

"Yes, I want to ask you why our horse has gone back in the betting?"

"That is the first news I have heard of it. Yesterday at the horse show, Oxwall said that he would be at four, or perhaps five to one, on."

"Oxwall is not always right in his prognostications. To-day, one very well up in such matters told me that he would soon be at evens, and Robert Milton is of the same opinion; he has put it in his paper, and all look on him as an authority. Either he, or Oxwall must be wrong."

"I don't care to enter into the question, but I am more than ever determined to back Snowflake; to what do you attribute his going back in the betting?"

"There are rumours flying about."

"What reports do you mean? Do they say the horse is sick?"

"They don't say anything definite, but it is understood that he will be beaten, and perhaps they will even insinuate that his owners will not run him to win. I will not listen to such reports, and I disdain them when they come to my ears. But the deduction that I draw from them is, that we must hold ourselves on our guard against any possible attempt at fraud on the part of the boys, or the jockey, and avoid giving the slightest handle to calumny. At this instant I wouldn't lay a hundred francs against our horse, even if I were certain that it would bring me in a million. A gentleman ought not even to be suspected."

"And we are both of us gentlemen. I will undertake to stop all these reports by openly backing Snowflake for a heavy sum, and I will do the same on Sunday at Longchamps."

"My dear fellow, I only told you of this to give you information as to what was going on, and I firmly believe that the day after to-morrow we shall make a really good thing of it. But now permit me to leave you, for I promised my wife to take her to dine at a restaurant. Don't look astonished, it is merely the carrying out of the plan that I told you of some time back. We had rather a stormy scene at the horse show, and I had to use whip, and spur; to-day my wife is as supple as a kid glove, and now is the time to give her her head a little." With this last remark, Saint Senior went off laughing at his companion, and Gontran was not sorry to get rid of him, for he had to come to an immediate decision as to his course of action.

Since he had received his father-in-law's letter, he had looked at his position from a new point. The unexpected change of fortune, had opened a new field to him. He had made up his mind to execute the agreement, even if he only carried out a portion of it, and he had no doubt but that he would secure the two hundred thousand francs the next morning from M. Vacheron.

Once in possession of such a sum there was nothing to prevent his at once paying to Oxwall the sum of four thousand louis which he owed him, and to free himself from the dangerous agreement which he had been driven to accept by stern necessity, or he might even say, by the fear of total ruin. What good would it do him to risk his whole reputation, his honour, and his social existence, by entering into a fraud with a bookmaker, who before going on to the course would have ceased to be his creditor? The risk besides, was much greater now that sinister rumours had been put in circulation in sporting circles, and if Saint Senier's reports were correct, he might even make more money by backing his horse, than by laying against it. If he acted straightforwardly he would gain largely, though he might not realise so heavy an amount as he would by the illegal arrangement to which he had given his adhesion. He had nothing to do but to back his horse for a larger sum, to watch over it so that no mere stableman might do the thing that he, the Count de Sartilly, had promised to carry out, and to warn Oxwall of his changed views of the matter, for he could not allow him to rush blindly to destruction without the dread of terrible reprisals. But how could he warn him? He did not wish to visit the bookmaker in his own house, nor did he like to ask him to meet him anywhere, lest they might be seen by persons who were acquainted with both of them, and who might suspect that they had met together to plot some racing fraud. Much less, could he explain his intentions in a letter, which Oxwall might at some future time use against him. After much deliberation he decided to send him a note to this effect: "On Sunday, at Longchamps, before the first race, I will pay you the four thousand louis I owe you; I wish you good luck." "He will understand that," thought he, "and I defy him to do me any harm with those two lines, and now the affair is off my shoulders."

Sartilly did not think that crimes, even if they are only planned, and not executed, always bring about their own punishment.

CHAPTER XXVI

MALVINA MARTINGALE

BILL OXWALL was certainly not an honest man, since he had endeavoured to induce the Count de Sartilly to join with him in a scandalous turf fraud ; but if he was not honest, he had all the outward appearance of being so, and lived the most regular life in the world. The rooms which he occupied in the Avenue de Neuilly, would have suited a rich citizen, and he was much looked up to by all his neighbours. His character on the turf was high, for he had never failed in meeting his engagements. His history, like that of many others in similar positions, was a curious one. The seventh son of a Yorkshire farmer, who could hardly afford to give him any education, he had taken his flight from home at an early age, and had come to London to seek his fortune, where he had tried several different kinds of respectable work. But he had no taste for sedentary occupation, and from his birth he had always been passionately fond of sport of all kinds, especially of racing. He had soon found his way into the society of betting men, with whom London swarms, and he commenced speculating on the turf with the small sum that he could save out of his salary. His first attempt had succeeded, and in the following year he had got on still better, and one Derby had given him the means to set up as a regular bookmaker. After ten years of mingled good and bad luck on the racecourses of England, he could have retired with a comfortable income which he had gained by good fortune and skill, without having too heavy a load on his conscience ; but Oxwall was a born adventurer. Gambling and betting were his second nature, and for all the wealth in the world he would not have relinquished the excitement of the ring. He had taken his business over to France, and with his large capital, and reputation for honesty, he held a high place in the ranks of Parisian bookmakers. Whenever the betting was heavy at Longchamps, at Chantilly, and at Auteuil, he had held his own. Oxwall had all the good qualities, as well as the bad ones, of a bookmaker. This man, who outside his profession would not have wronged anyone of a half-penny, and who in the course of business paid up with the most scrupulous honesty, had rather low notions as to the means that it was legitimate to employ to

arrive at his ends. Bribing a jockey, or drugging a horse, he simply called *getting the pull*. He therefore did not feel the slightest remorse in having suggested a dishonourable course to Gontran, and his only fear was that his accomplice might change his mind; but he was well acquainted with the desperate position of the Count, and he did not doubt his carrying out the project as settled between them, as there were no other means for him to avoid utter ruin. He had only forty-eight hours longer to wait, since the verbal arrangement had been completed at the horse show, and the Produce Stakes were to be run for on the next day but one.

But there is many a slip between the cup, and the lip, and misfortune always finds some hole through which to effect an entrance, and on Saturday morning Oxwall was disagreeably surprised by receiving Gontran's laconic note. He even flew into a violent passion as he perused it. "Oh, the rogue, the rascal, the blackguard, the moucher," exclaimed he, mixing up French and English slang terms of abuse in his anger; "he is going to round on me, and wants to ruin me, but he shall pay me for this trick. I will drag him through mud and mire. Everyone shall know what a swindling cheat he is; I will repeat it in all places, and will get him turned out of his club." Worthy Mr. Oxwall seemed to forget that if Gontran had not kept his word it was for the express purpose of not running any such risk as that with which he threatened him, and that he ought not to blame him for *acting on the square*. But he was not an Englishman, and a Yorkshireman, for nothing, and he soon resumed his customary coolness. "After all," thought he, "I shall get my eighty thousand francs, which he owes me, and which he promised to pay me before the first race. Where, I wonder, can he have stolen such a sum from, when yesterday he hadn't a rap. Perhaps he has won at cards at his club. But no, then he would have kept the money to have betted with. He must have again made it up with his wife, and got his father-in-law to shell out once more, and if he had not got a good haul he would not have been so cheeky about paying up. His note is clear enough; it means, 'You can rely on my money, but on nothing else.' Lucky for me that I know French well, or I might have come to grief over it. If this cur of a fine nobleman had not left me in the lurch, I might have made a million, and now at the least I shall lose a hundred thousand francs, even allowing for the eighty thousand that he will pay me, and perhaps he won't even do that, for I wouldn't believe him on his oath. I am in a nice hole, indeed." In great anger, Oxwall walked up and down the room, the windows of which looked upon the

Avenue de Neuilly ; all of a sudden he stopped short, like a man in whose head a sudden idea has been born, and he exclaimed : "No, I will not be done. I will get out of it somehow, and I will ruin him into the bargain. He doesn't wish Snowflake to lose, but by Jove, he shall ! Mowbridge is to ride him, and I know the fellow from top to toe. He is a first-class rider, but if scruples counted in the weighing, they ought to give him ten pounds, for he hasn't an ounce of them. Mowbridge is a thorough bad lot, a drunkard, a hunter after the girls, and a spendthrift, always hard up. Lord Winter was obliged to discharge him once, and he only took him back because there is not another one on the turf that can ride like him. For five hundred pounds he would sell his father, especially when he has dropped his money over cards, and he nearly always does so. He is the very man for me. The question is where to find him, and to find him at once. I know that he is in Paris, but deuce take me if I know where he lodges. I might meet him at the Madrid, at Borne's stables, as the horse is there, but I will take care not to show my nose in that place. Everybody knows me there, stablemen, waiters, and all, and if Sartilly heard of it, he would certainly have his suspicions that I was going to try it on with his jockey. But I must get hold of Mowbridge—how shall I manage it? If I only knew where he went to feed ; but then the fellow has no regular habits, he dines sometimes here, and sometimes there ; not far from here, in the Route de la Révolte, there is a tavern much frequented by jockeys, but Mowbridge does not chum with the others, besides, a sporting tavern is a bad place to talk over a shady affair. Everybody has his eyes wide open, and would easily guess that I don't come there to drink stout or porter. I must find out some other spot in which to meet my man."

This prolonged monologue did not hinder Oxwall from continuing to walk up and down his room ; but at length he stopped opposite the window, as if he thought the fresh air might give him an idea, and inspire him with some novel means to parry the blow that had been dealt him by the Count. But no fresh idea came, and his restless mind could only grasp all the difficulties of his position. "Suppose Mowbridge declines," thought he ; "I might just hit on the time when he was flush of money. He betted pretty freely last Sunday, and I think he pulled off his money. It is true that coin slips easily through his fingers. Then he knows perfectly well what he risks. To be sent to the right about at once, and forbidden to ride again in England or France, unless he is clever enough to prevent the judges or any one else seeing anything during the race. In any case

he would ask for a good lump sum to sell his masters. That would be a matter to be talked over, and I don't much care to do it myself. Where can I find a go-between? A woman would be the best, if she were only shrewd and clever. Mowbridge adores the girls, especially the French ones, and they can lead him just where they please. But where can I find one that I can safely charge with such a commission? I know a dozen who pass their time with the jockies, but I haven't an idea where they roost, nor the time, to go and find out. Then these girls talk so; but after all no one believes them, so that their chattering don't do much harm. Besides, I have no choice. Virtuous women do not pick their lovers out of the stableyard." Much annoyed at being unable to find a solution to his problem, Oxwall lighted a cigar, and leaning on the window-sill began to smoke. He had not been there five minutes when he saw coming along the street a lady very loudly dressed, who made signs to him with her sunshade. He did not at first recognise her, but she stopped just underneath his window, and looked up at him.

"Why it is Malvina!" exclaimed he.

Oxwall's rooms were on the first floor, so it was easy for him to enter into conversation with the lady.

"Good-day, Mr. Two-to-one-bar-one," said the lady.

"How are you, my dear, and what are you doing up my way?"

"I want a good tip."

"Come up, and I will give you one," returned the book-maker, muttering to himself, "It is the devil that has sent her to me to-day."

Malvina Martingale, the lady who was seeking for a tip, was a tall well-made girl, with brown hair and eyes, as impudent as they are made, and without an atom of morals. No one knew whether her name was really Martingale, or whether it was a soubriquet that she had adopted from her avowed fondness for the jockies, and everything connected with racing. She had commenced by taking a high position in the army of the irregulars, and had had her house and carriage, but all of a sudden she had descended to the lower grades of sporting life. A sudden fancy for a young trainer had brought her down from the height that she had attained. She now lived amongst the subalterns of the turf, book-makers, jockies, stud-grooms, and such members of the lower racing world, and did not seem at all to regret her former position. The case is not a novel one. Many women of the irregular division of Paris take their lovers from one certain class. There are those who adore the officers of the army, not counting the nurses which affect the private soldier. Others have a weakness for artists of every kind, painters,

sculptors, musicians, and actors. Women of the quas virtuous classes sometimes are the rivals of these ladies and some of them even descend so low as gymnasts and performers on the trapeze. There are some who love everything connected with horses, both those who ride them, and those who look after them. These, never miss a race, and endeavour to be present at the trials of the favourites in the forest of Chantilly. Sometimes they pick up a little money, but more often they lose all, and how they live is a mystery ; but it seems as if Providence supplied both them, and the little birds with the means of existence. Malvina, however, had saved something from the wreck of her former splendour, and had still a few useful friends ; she was always well-dressed, and was a thoroughly jolly girl. The larger book-makers, after a good day's work when all the backers had lost, would often take her to dinner at the Café du Cascade in the Bois de Boulogne, and on those days, their money slipped readily through their fingers. Even Oxwall the respectable, had taken her out once or twice, and they had always continued the best of friends. So when she crossed the threshold of his door, he received her with open arms. "That was an excellent idea of yours to come up my way," said he after he had installed her in a comfortable arm-chair. "I never have any ideas but good ones," answered the young lady with a smile. "I went out this morning to wander about by the Madrid to see if I could catch a glimpse of any of the racing cracks, which are to run to-morrow for the Produce Stakes, but I had my walk for my pains, and I was putting my best leg foremost to come home, you know I live at the Port Maillot now ; when I saw you smoking a cigar at your window, and I said to myself, here is a stroke of luck, my old Two-to-one-bar-one will perhaps give me a breakfast."

"Breakfast, dinner, anything you like."

"Bravo ! you are not like that stingy hunk Disney, the trainer, whom I met this morning at Borne's, who did not even offer me a glass of Madeira, and therefore I love you for what you say, I do, on my word of honour."

"You are a good girl, and I have always liked you and will do anything to please you."

"Then give me the tip, the famous tip, that you promised me out of your window. It will come in awfully handy, for I am cleaned out, only nineteen francs, fifty centimes in my purse to last me until the end of the month, and not a sou in my strong box. Fortunately I have '*my uncle*' to fall back on."

"You won't want to pop your jewellery, if you follow my advice."

"Then your tip is a certainty. You are a love of a man. Does he run in the Produce Stakes?"

"It is not exactly a tip that I was referring to ——"

"Eh! What? Have you been making a fool of me?"

"Not at all, you will make plenty of money all the same, much more than if you backed any favourite. For nothing is absolutely sure; horses, you know as well as I do, are very deceiving."

"They are like men then," returned Malvina, who was always ready with a repartee.

"Come, be serious," said Oxwall, a little crossly, "otherwise I can do nothing with you."

"Don't fret yourself, old man, but explain what you mean. I don't ask any better than to gain some money, for I am in a rare hole. Must I ask you again how I am to do it. I am not particular, but there are things that I wouldn't do for an empire."

"Ah, an empire is vague, and as things go, one may be had cheap."

"Not for a hundred louis then," returned the young lady, who hadn't had a hundred louis at once for a long time past.

"For two hundred then!"

"It would depend what I was asked for in return."

"But for five hundred?"

"Ah, now you are opening your mouth. That is a pretty little sum, five hundred louis, that makes ten thousand francs, and ten thousand francs are not often found in a horse racing plate, much less in my purse."

"Well, it only depends on yourself to have them to-morrow in good bank notes."

"Is it your intention to offer them to me. That would be very nice of you, my little William, but no—you are not mean with women I know, but not so liberal as all that, and besides you seem to be thinking of something serious, and not of women, and such trifles."

"There is a time for everything, my dear girl, but you have hit the right nail on the head, this is a business matter."

"One that will bring me in ten thousand francs?"

"As sure as you are sitting there. It is I who will give them to you."

"Then I am ready, for you are not the man to sell an old pal. What am I to do for them?"

"Precious little, I have booked some foolish bets, and have given too much against one of the horses that is to run to-morrow in the Produce Stakes. If he wins, I am half ruined."

"That would be awkward, you who are so kind to the girls,

when you are in luck. I hope with all my heart that the backers will find themselves in the wrong box, and that you will have a grand day of it. But tell me how can I help you?"

"You can help me by preventing a confounded horse from winning when there is every chance of his doing so."

"Ah, I begin to understand now; you want him to fall sick between this and to-morrow, so that he could not come to the post; but I can't help you there. Do you think that they let me into the stables? and besides, I don't like horse-poisoning, I am too fond of them to injure them."

"And so am I! a horse-poisoner ought to be hung, but there are other means ——"

"I cannot see one. Can you not make terms with the owner? there are plenty of them who are rogues enough to enter into a combination of the kind if they can get enough by it."

"I can't do that with this one."

"Ah, if he is on the straight, there is nothing to be done with him—what is his name?"

"What good would it do you to know?"

"I should like to know the name of so rare a bird, I haven't much faith in the honour of these gentlemen. There are some I believe who are all right, and I shouldn't like to do them an ill-turn."

"Do you believe in the honesty of the jockeys?"

"Not in that of all of them, but there are some worthy fellows amongst them."

"You see a good deal of them."

"Well, I don't know; certainly I have some friends amongst them."

"I know that, and for that reason I thought you might be useful to me."

"Do you think that I shall find one who for the sake of my pretty face would risk being prevented from riding?"

"Your pretty face would go a long way, and the man who gives in to it, should have his slice of the cake."

"The cake must be a big one then. These fellows don't work for nothing. They risk too much by playing tricks, and when their employer is open handed, it is their interest to serve him faithfully."

"I will go as high as a thousand louis for the jockey, in addition to your five hundred."

"Well then, we may come to terms, but I am a straightforward girl, and will not touch a commission that I have not earned. Why do you want me to act as the go-between! Why don't you speak to the jockey yourself?"

"Because he might distrust me, whereas if you go to work the right way, you will hook him at once."

"I am not so certain, I could give you the names of two or three who would take your money, but the others —"

"Do you know John Mowbridge?"

"Do I know him? Why for the last three months he has been dead spoons on me, tho' I would have nothing to say to him."

"Then," exclaimed the bookmaker, "I have come to the right person. You hold Mowbridge in your hand, as he is in love with you. I know him too, and I tell you that he isn't the man to turn up his nose at money, especially when he's a bit hard up."

"And that is what he is just now," said Malvina. "Last Sunday at Longchamps, he spent his money like a fool, and now he hasn't a rap."

"Is it because he was hard up that you would have nothing to say to him?"

"No; when he came over from England last, he had plenty of money, and he made me many offers, but I wouldn't."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't like him; look here, I am not like so many of the others, I don't take up with the first comer because he has got a few louis in his pocket. This Mowbridge is as ugly as a caterpillar, with his nose like a screw, and his parchment-coloured chops, and then though I haven't a weakness for your drum-major style of man, Mowbridge has too much of the Liliputian about him—why, I could put him in my pocket; when he rides they always have to put extra leads into the saddle cloth to bring him up to the right weight."

"Yes, that is all right, but he is a thoroughly bad lot."

"Yes, whenever wickedness was being served out he got his share; French and English vice, he has got both. As cunning as a monkey, always running after money, and flinging it out of window when he gets it."

"You see that there is some good in him after all," said Oxwall, gravely.

"I don't profess not to understand what you mean. I have only to lift up my little finger for him to spend all he has on me. But what would you have? As a jockey I admire him much, but as a lover, even a temporary one, no, thank you."

"Come, Malvina, you might strain a point for an old friend like me."

"That is true—you never refused to lend me five louis when I wanted them, and you have sometimes tipped me a winner, but Mowbridge, no, that is too much."

"But you haven't quarrelled with him, I am sure, for I saw you talking on the course last Sunday?"

"Oh no, we are always very good friends, and he never meets me without asking me to breakfast, or dine with him according to what time it is."

"If you accept, there is nothing to prevent your letting him know my offer at dessert. He won't refuse it. A thousand louis is a nice sum to handle, and I expect you will get a share of it."

"Listen to me, my old Billy boy, I would do a great deal to give you a helping hand, and I feel quite capable of promising to let him be my lover, so long as I may change my mind afterwards."

"As to that, do as you like; all I want him to do is to arrange so that his horse may come in second or third."

"But tell me now, the horse that he is to ride to-morrow is Snowflake, eh?" said Malvina, who was well up in all the nominations for the races.

"Precisely, I see that you know all about it."

"But, my dear, Mowbridge will have the greatest difficulty to manage it, for Snowflake is a first-class horse."

"There isn't a horse on this earth who will not be beaten if he is badly ridden. The result of the race will depend entirely upon Mowbridge."

"I know that he doesn't like his employers much, and I hate both those swells. Saint Senier is a ridiculous ass; he was at the horse show yesterday with his wife, who has a face like a piece of boiled beef, and who makes him—well, I won't say what. Sartilly is a handsome fellow, but his manners displease me. No true gentleman is rude to any woman, whoever she may be."

"Well, you have an excellent opportunity to play them both a nice trick."

"I shall be glad to do so, and so will Mowbridge, for I tell you again he doesn't love them."

"Has he told you so?"

"Oh, very often; he regrets his Englishman, who was very generous to him, and gave him twenty-five thousand francs as a present when he won a big race, which was good, was it not?"

"Well, but he hasn't yet ridden for these gentlemen, and does not know how they may behave."

"No, but he has estimated them pretty correctly. Saint Senier is one of those mean hounds who would shave an egg; and Sartilly is a basket with a hole in it; he might want to be liberal but he hasn't got anything left in him."

"Therefore Mowbridge would not lose much by quitting

them, and I offer him such a fee for serving me, as he would never get out of them ; and I really think, my little Malvina, that you will have no trouble in deciding him."

"Very well, I will try."

"That is all right, and you will succeed I am sure."

"I hope so, but you must understand that he won't do anything on an empty promise ; he knows very well that I haven't twenty-five thousand francs in my pocket, for you will go up to twenty-five, won't you ? so as not to be under the English lord's present. I may promise then as much as I like to Mowbridge, but he will want some sort of security. If I might only tell him that you will pay him, it will be all right, for he knows that your word is your bond, and that you have plenty of money."

"Yes, but as I tell you, I don't want to appear in the matter, and that was why I came to you. I want to be behind the scenes. If I have to show myself, I will throw up the whole affair."

"Then I fear it will fall through."

"Not so, for there is a means to arrange it. I know that whatever you may be, you are as straight as a die in money matters, and I am ready to give you half the money down, and the rest after the race."

"That is the way to talk ! if you will let me show him the notes, he will believe me."

"Ten notes of a thousand francs each at once, and for you——"

"Oh, I want nothing in advance. I know you, and am quite easy about my money. You will pay me right enough after the race. That is the surest, for after all Snowflake may win in spite of Mowbridge, and I don't see how he can make him lose."

"That is because you don't know all the dodges. All depends on him, and he can so arrange it that no one will be able to see anything. Believe me, my girl, if he minds what he is about he will not only gain my twenty-five thousand, but he will still keep in these gentlemen's employment, if he wants to."

"He does not care much about it, but if he can't get anything better, the place is a good one. His profession is all that he has to live by, he has no other, and he doesn't want to be warned off every course, for he wants money for his vices. At any rate, I will make him the proposal ; if he accepts, he can get out of it as he likes ; at any rate I shan't mix myself up in that."

"I don't ask you to do anything more. But you have not a moment to lose, for Snowflake runs to-morrow. I must

know his decision to-day, so that I may make my arrangements if Mowbridge should refuse."

"Certainly. Well, you shall know."

"Then you will undertake to find your man this morning?"

"I am sure of it; what time is it now?"

"Past eleven o'clock."

"Mowbridge would be now at the *café*, where he always breakfasts when he is in Paris, unless he's had a drop too much yesterday—but that is not likely—for I know his habits, and when he is going to ride, he is most abstemious."

"Where is this *café*?"

"Nearly opposite the Northern Station."

"Ah! I know it: that is the one most frequented by the Chantilly trainers, who go to have a drink there when they get out of the train; all the more reason that I should not show my nose there. They all know me, and if they saw me talking with Mowbridge, they would guess that something was up."

"Well, they won't take any notice of me, for they are accustomed to see me with the little chap, and they know that he is after me; therefore there will be nothing surprising in my breakfasting with him."

"Then that will be all right. When you have once sat down, put the matter plainly to him, after having taken care that there is no one within earshot."

"No fear of that—Mowbridge, always gets away into a corner, right at the end of the room; besides, I'll keep my eyes open. It is settled, then, that your name is not to be mentioned, but I am sure that he will ask me who the proposal comes from."

"Tell him that it comes from some one who has backed Cash-on-Delivery heavily."

"Ah! the outsider that is at sixty to one."

"An outsider that will be placed, I can tell you, even if he does not come in first. But that is of no consequence; Mowbridge will believe whatever you like to tell him, if you let him get a glimpse of the *flimseys*."

"I shall take care not to flash them about too much. The fellows who frequent that place have good eyes."

"Well, only take care, and don't let go of them until you have come to a proper understanding."

"He certainly won't give me a written one."

"That would be useless, for if he didn't keep to it, I should not be likely to sue him on it. I am willing enough to take his word. If he breaks it I shall lose five hundred louis, but he will lose seven hundred and fifty, which I should have paid him to-morrow night. So that if anyone is to be a loser it will be he."

"He will keep his word if he gives it to *me* ; but I suppose that I shall have to keep faith with him, and he is so outrageously ugly."

"Never mind, you can use your ten thousand franc notes that I shall give you as a bandage for your eyes."

"I hope I shall get some others out of him ; but remember, old fellow, it is all for your sake."

"I know all about that ; but now come and take some of these pretty curl papers."

Oxwall always carried plenty of money about him. It is one of the necessities of a bookmaker's occupation to do so. He pulled out of his pocket-book a nice little lot of notes pinned together, which he offered to Mlle. Martingale, who began to finger them before putting them in her pocket.

"It is a long time since I have seen so many at once," said she.

"To be continued in our next," answered Oxwall gaily.

"You are a duck of a man ! where shall I find you to tell you the result of my embassy ? If you like to come as far as the Northern Station, you could remain in the waiting-room there. The café is only just across the road."

"Thank you," answered Oxwall quickly. "Trains come in from Chantilly every few minutes, and I should be certain to be twigg'd by some of those chaps who know me ; besides, you would keep me waiting too long. A business breakfast, is as bad as a lover's meeting, and might be prolonged indefinitely, and your sitting with Mowbridge combines both of them."

"Oh, we shall breakfast in the public room, so it won't be much of a lovers' meeting ; but anyhow the meeting may be a long one, and I don't want you to waste your time. Shall we meet at two o'clock then in Montholon Square ?"

"That will suit me, though it is generally pretty full."

"Yes, with nurses, babies, and private soldiers ; no one of that class knows you ; they will think that you are talking to your young woman. Do you know that you ought to have one ?"

"So I should if I had the time, and, most likely it would be you ; but I have no leisure. Well, I will be in the square at two."

"Most likely I shall be there before you ; but I am off now, for fear of losing my man. The Northern Station is not too near to us, but I can take a cab over."

"Ah ! you remind me that I have something to give you. The ten thousand was on account for Mowbridge, but you cannot enter on the campaign without the sinews of war. Hold out your pretty paw, my dear."

Mlle. Martingale opened her hand with an expectant smile, and Oxwall put into it a dozen louis which he fished out of his waistcoat pocket, which was always well furnished.

"This is nothing to do with what you are to have this evening. These are for your expenses at the café."

"Thanks, I accept them; the nineteen francs fifty that I had in my purse would not go very far, and I don't want that ape to take me for a sponge. That would hinder the negotiation, whilst now he shall invite me to breakfast, and I will pay the bill. That will be much more the thing."

"That's a good girl! you go into the thing well, and I am a lucky man to have you on my side. Now, suppose you be off, and good-bye until two o'clock."

"Give me a kiss, then, for that will make me lucky."

Oxwall did not hesitate to give Malvina a fatherly salute, and the girl flew off like a bird. A moment afterwards she was rolling rapidly in a cab in the direction of the Northern Station, whilst the bookmaker rubbed his hands in joyous anticipation of his success. These two understood each other perfectly; the young lady, who had a weakness for all those connected with the turf, had the same ideas of honesty as her employer. They both possessed an elastic conscience, with but few professional scruples. Neither of them would have stolen a pocket-book which had been forgotten on a mantelpiece, but both thought it legitimate to gain money by means which are not in use amongst rigidly honest persons.

Both Oxwall and Malvina were always ready to take advantage of fools, but by different methods. As a matter of fact, they were both of them better than Count Gontran de Sartilly, and much more excusable.

CHAPTER XXVII

A DELICATE MISSION

MALVINA got out at the railway waiting-room, so as not to be remarked by the loungers in the café. She wanted to make it look as if she had just come by train, and, luckily for her, one arrived at that moment, and it was easy for her to mingle with the stream of passengers that flowed through the door. She had only to cross the road to enter the café, where she hoped to meet Mowbridge, and although but few of the tables were occupied, she had some trouble in discovering him, half hidden as he was in a corner. He was seated alone, with a pint of porter in front of him, and he took up so little space that it was not easy to detect him at once. Mowbridge was a mite of a man, certainly not more than five feet in height, and with hardly an atom of flesh on his bones, full of muscle, as thin as a weasel, with a mean-looking face, which completed his resemblance to that unpleasant little animal. Malvina had not exaggerated at all that he was hideous, and to-day he looked more unpleasant than ever. With half-shut eyes, and a pipe stuck in his mouth, he smoked on without looking at anyone, and without emptying his glass.

He was well dressed in a suit of clothes of English cut, and looked the jockey all over.

He had been there more than an hour, and the waiters, who knew his habits, had not attempted to disturb him. Mlle. Martingale was less respectful; she went straight up to him, and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Hulloa! old John, wake up; this isn't the time of day for a snooze, my boy."

The man gave a start, raised his head, and his countenance rose, as he recognised Malvina, for whom he had a weakness.

"I have come to breakfast with you," said she. "I have invited myself."

"I ain't hungry," grunted Mowbridge.

"All the better, you won't cost me so much, for I am going to stand it," retorted the young lady, with a burst of laughter. "But I'll lay odds you are thirsty." Then, as he made no answer, she continued, "Leave that porter alone, it only makes you stupid, and let us have some brandy together."

"Of course, I will always drink with you," said Mowbridge.

"Waiter," said Malvina, "breakfast for two : boiled eggs, cold roast beef, Chester cheese, a bottle of your best chablis, and another of brandy."

"Immediately, madame."

"And now," continued Malvina, addressing the rider for the Sartilly and Saint Senier stable, "make room for me, to sit down by you. I have a heap of things to tell you."

Mowbridge, who was quite delighted, drew on one side so as to permit her to sit down by him. "First," said she, "I want to know what on earth makes you look like a miserable devil. Is it to show your appreciation of my visit that you put on a face like that."

Mowbridge understood French well enough, but he did not speak it very fluently, so he avoided making long speeches.

"I am very pleased to see you," said he.

"That is lucky, but what is the matter with you?"

"I am—awfully—bothered."

"What about, come, tell me all your troubles."

"Well, in the first place, I am fond of you, and you laugh at me."

"Well, who knows how matters may turn out, if you behave yourself. But there is something behind that. I'll bet that you lost last Sunday at Longchamps."

"Not only on Sunday, and somewhere else besides at Longchamps."

"In some gambling hell then, last night?"

"Yes, I haven't been to bed yet."

"Ah, you lead a nice life, you do. The day before riding a race, too ! why there is no sense in it. How much did you lose?"

"Three hundred pounds, and not a half-penny to pay them with."

"The deuce ! I can understand that you must be in a sweet temper. But after all, seven thousand five hundred francs isn't anything outrageous ; why you can pick up that easily if you win the Produce Stakes."

"Yes, if the bookmakers will bet with me, but they know that I am head-over-ears in debt."

"Well, but you are sure of pulling it off, are you not?"

"Oh, yes ! I shall win easy."

"Well, but the owners will give you five hundred pounds at least, as a present."

"Not a hundred ; they are awfully close, especially Saint Senier."

"And Sartilly is played out ; old John, I pity you."

This dialogue was interrupted by the waiter bringing the brandy, and the other things that had been ordered.

"How old is your cognac?" asked Malvina, of the waiter.
"Ten years older than you, Miss."

"Get along with you, I am five-and-twenty, so that would make it thirty-six, and the oldest that you have isn't six. Never mind, so long as it will let us drink it." She did not dare to say "as long as it will make him drunk!" although her design was to make Mowbridge intoxicated, and she poured him out a bumper of brandy, and drank his health herself in Chablis. She had a fine appetite, and after having finished the eggs in the twinkling of an eye, she attacked the roast beef, but she could not induce her guest to eat. He remained deaf to all her persuasions on this point, though he drank deeply; but unluckily the more he drank, the more taciturn and gloomy he became, and Mlle. Martingale felt that she must not delay broaching the important question until he was thoroughly intoxicated. "Your owners don't desire that you should put yourself out of the way for them," said she; "if I were in your place, I would let them in."

"If I was sure of getting something better, I would play them a nice trick, but I haven't another place in view."

"Yes, I should think I would play them a trick. Why, these gentlemen, for whom you are going to gain hundreds of thousands of francs, for I know that they have backed their horse heavily, absolutely bargain with you. It is really disgraceful. If I were you, John Mowbridge, I'd see what sort of a face they would put on if Snowflake was beaten."

"So I would, but it doesn't depend on me."

"Don't talk rubbish! on the contrary all depends on you."

"Possibly; but how would it all end? I should be abused like a pickpocket, lose my present place, and if it was found out that I had pulled the horse, I should be kicked out like a shot."

Malvina looked at him fixedly. "I am just going to tell you how it would all end."

"How it would end!" repeated the jockey, with a shake of his head, "in a deuced bad way, I should be disqualified from riding, that's all, and as I can't lay against the horse I am to ride, I don't see what I should gain by making him lose."

"In the first place you would gain my heart," returned Malvina, with a smile, "for I should love you at once, my little John."

"You say so now, but ——"

"And I will prove it to you. It is some time since I have commenced to have a liking for you. Certainly you are not handsome, but you are awfully funny, and have wit enough

for half a dozen ; I have a perfect horror of fools, and you suit me down to the ground."

"I shouldn't have thought it."

"Because I kept you off rather a long time. You don't expect a woman to throw herself at a man's head. People either have, or have not some decency. Well, I am one of those that have, but I am not a prude by a long chalk, and if you would be nice to me I would not be behindhand, and would show you what a real Parisian girl is like when she lays herself out to please."

Mowbridge, with the light of desire gleaming in his eyes, gazed at her, but he was in no hurry to reply.

"What do you call being nice to you," said he at last.

"Don't play the innocent with me ; you know well enough that I want to prevent your two fine gentlemen from winning the Grand Produce Stakes."

"Why, what is your reason for that ?"

"I am down on them."

"Down on them !" repeated Mowbridge, who evidently did not comprehend her.

"It means that I detest them both. Sartilly said that I was ugly, and Saint Senier last year had me turned out of the weighing enclosure, though I had come in there on the arm of a Brazilian who was quite the gentleman ; though for that matter I am as respectable as his wife who is in love with her coachman. I vowed that I would be revenged at the first opportunity, and here it is, and a good one too."

"It may be a good one for you, but not for me. I should risk a great deal for nothing."

"Ah ! there you go thinking that I want you to do work for nothing. No, no, my dear fellow, I know the world, and what I propose would bring you in a good round sum, much more than your fine employers would give you."

The expression on the jockey's face changed at once, and he became so serious in a moment that Malvina at once guessed that the wish to gain money was strong within him.

"Now I will put down my cards fairly," continued she quickly. "What would you say if I offered you twenty-five thousand francs to pull your horse in the race ?"

"But have you really got twenty-five thousand francs ?"

"Why shouldn't I have them ? You think that because I haven't a carriage, now that I have gone to smash. Learn, my little man, that I could have one at once if I wanted it. If I have curtailed my expenditure, it was because I like to save a bit, but I might roll in gold if I liked. I have always had an eye to the main chance, and have put away something for a rainy day : there is a good lining to my strong box, and

all those who roll by in their carriages can't say the same, but, old man, I only say this to you, because you don't let your tongue wag too freely."

The real truth was that Malvina had not saved anything in the days of her prosperity, and had on the spur of the moment invented this state of opulency; but she said to herself: "If I can only make him believe that it is I who pay, he will never suspect that Oxwall supplies me with the money." But if she wanted money, Mowbridge did not want cunning, and shaking his head, he replied, "If you are rich, it is all the better for you, but you are a very foolish woman to spend more than a thousand pounds sterling to injure these gentlemen who have had the misfortune to annoy you. If we could get someone else to find the money to work out your plan, it would be a different matter."

"Decidedly there is a hitch in the matter," thought Mlle. Martingale; then rapidly changing her ground, she said, "Well, suppose then that I have a partner, that would not alter the state of affairs? You will be all the more certain of being paid."

"In this life we are sure of nothing," said Mowbridge, sententiously.

"Right, and the proof of that is that these gentlemen absolutely believe that they are certain of winning the Produce Stakes, and it is also certain that you can make them lose. But would you believe in the twenty-five thousand francs if you saw them?"

"Show them to me."

"That is easy enough, and presently I will convince you; but you do not suppose that I will give them to you unless you engage to earn them, and before that, I want to know how you will arrange to have Snowflake beaten?"

"That is my secret. Why should I trust you, when you won't trust me?"

"Here is a question in return. If I give you the money in advance, what guarantee have I that you will keep faith with me?"

"In this way we shall never come to an understanding."

"Perhaps there may be another means. Suppose I gave you a good sum down, and the rest after the horse had been beaten?"

"I will accept that."

"Good! only I repeat that you must tell me how you will manage it. It is easy to say that you will make the horse that you are riding lose."

"And easy to do, too," answered Mowbridge.

"Why then did you tell me a little time back that it did not depend on you to do so?"

"Because I had not made up my mind to accept your proposal. You persisted that it was very simple and so it is?"

"Yes, in holding him in, or stopping him half way, but everyone would see that, and you would be disqualified as a rider for the rest of your life. Not to mention that you would have a bad time of it amongst the crowd. Why, the backers of Snowflake would be ready to murder you when you went to weigh. Are you disposed to risk that inconvenience, apart from your exclusion from every course?"

"There are other means than those."

"What are they, John, my boy?"

"First, one can get off badly; that is a thing of everyday occurrence where you are riding a thoroughbred; you let the others that are making the running get a start, you pick up a little, and in the run in you give him his head——"

"And come in with a rush in the straight. Why every lad knows that, and it would go against us, for you would win."

"That depends on how much start you let the others get. If they have too much, you can't catch them up again, and no one can blame the jockey. A thing just like that happened at the Chantilly Derby."

"That is to say that the public did not detect it; without accusing you of fraud, the owner might call you an awkward hound and kick you out."

"I should easily console myself for that, for I don't care much for remaining with those gentlemen. But it is not an easy game to play with a horse like Snowflake. It is as much as I can do to hold him, though I have a good pair of arms, and he might make a bolt of it, and win in spite of me."

"Then that trick isn't worth much."

"You can also take the outside instead of the inside of the course, and make the long round, instead of the short one."

"No, no, not a soul would believe in a fly fellow like you doing such a foolish thing. That plan, too, is bad."

"Then I can drug the horse in the stable."

"No, I won't have any poisoning."

"I don't like it either."

"Well, then, what is to be done? It seems as if he must gain in spite of you."

"I have kept the best plan for the last. I can lose weight during the race."

"How can you do that? You can't grow thin in four minutes?" said Malvina, with a laugh.

"No, but I am so much lighter than the other jockeys, that I always have to carry weight; suppose that some of it dropped during the race?"

"Good, good, that is an idea at last."

"I win. I go to the weighing room, they put me in the scales with my saddle on my lap, and they find that I am six pounds under weight. I might as well have come in last. The second horse is declared the winner. The crowd hoot and swear when the number goes up, but it is no use, the horse has lost the race."

"That is the really good game ; if you only think that you can drop the leads between the start and the finish."

"Yes, I can ; but if I tell you all this, it is to show you that the result of the race depends on me."

"Then the matter is settled ?"

"Not yet."

"Ah ! I understand, you want to see the fimseys. Wait a moment," and Mlle. Martingale began to undo the bosom of her dress. Then she pulled out the packet that Oxwall had given her, and placed it on the table between the Chester cheese and the bottle of brandy, which was nearly exhausted, for Mowbridge took a deep draught between each of his replies.

"There," said she, "are ten out of the twenty-five. You will have the balance, as I told you, to-morrow after the race. Is the instalment sufficient ?"

"Quite so."

"Then pocket it, old John. You have given me your word, and I am satisfied. You would not let me appear a mug, in the eyes of my partner."

But to Malvina's great surprise Mowbridge did not attempt to take up the notes that she placed before him.

"Well," exclaimed she, rather ironically, "does your tender conscience want more soothing. Tell me, what more do you require ?"

The small eyes of the jockey blazed with eagerness, Malvina for the moment thought that he was completely intoxicated, and for precaution's sake was about to remove the banknotes from beyond his reach, when he bent towards her and hoarsely whispered in her ear, "*I want you.*"

"All right, we will dine together after the race ; but, remember, I am not like my partner : I don't pay anything in advance."

"I will wait, but I shan't be content with what you offer me."

"The deuce," exclaimed Malvina, "you want a lot. What more are you going to ask me ? You have already got my heart, do you want my hand in addition ? No, no, my little man, not that—Flattered as I should be to be styled Madame Mowbridge, I am not going before the Registrar. I am for liberty and not for a binding wedlock."

"I was not thinking of the Registrar," replied the jockey.

"I am very glad of it, and I must have misunderstood you, for I said to myself, 'why on earth does he want to set up house-keeping, and with me too?' Ah! we two should get on well together. It would be as pleasant a household as the Saint Senier's or the Sartilly's, without the money they have."

"You said just now that you had money."

"I have enough to live on. But come, explain yourself. What am I to do to satisfy you?"

"Come and live with me entirely; follow me to England."

"Follow you to England? do you think that I am going to live in your confounded country?"

"I shall probably be forced to do so. When Snowflake is beaten I shall most likely lose my berth; and even if they do not accuse me of having lost the race purposely, they will say that I have ridden badly, or that I am unlucky, therefore no French owner of horses will give me a mount again, but in England, where I am well known, I shall easily get employment. You see what I shall risk to oblige you."

"You exaggerate matters, my dear John; I agree with you that you will not remain with Sartilly and Co., but that won't hurt you, for this reason, that stable won't pull off anything and will go to smash, and you will get a berth in a more solvent concern. The racing season has only just begun."

"I know that, but all places are filled up."

"There will be a vacancy; besides, the twenty-five thousand francs which you will receive will enable you to wait patiently for a bit."

"A thousand pounds won't last me long."

"I won't help you to squander them, since I love you for yourself, and not for your money."

"You can love me as well in England."

"Not a bit of it. I know your island, for once I went to London with a friend; at the end of three days we began to quarrel; I was like a fish out of water. The fog irritated my nerves. Another time I made the acquaintance of a Scotch lord, and paid him a visit at his seat in the North. I think that he would have finished by marrying me, but at the end of a month I could stand it no longer, and took to my heels."

"If you had stayed a year you would have got used to it."

"Never; I should have been a dead woman."

"You wouldn't say so if you knew anything of real English country life: a cottage not too far from London, but just far enough, chickens, cows, and perhaps some babies to look after."

"That sounds charming; but I am not cut out for the farm business, much less am I suited to be the mother of a family; and I don't think you would make a very good gentleman farmer as they call it there."

"It wouldn't prevent my riding, and making lots of money by the races."

"And drinking it away in the public-house of the village, and losing it at whist or poker, to your friends!"

"Not often; and I should be quite satisfied to come home after a good day at Epsom, Ascot, Doncaster and Goodwood, with my pockets full of guineas, and have a cup of tea with my little woman."

"Who would have been bored out of her life all day, and would be half asleep when you did come in. Thank you, I prefer a dinner at the Café des Ambassadeurs, in the gallery, to hear Mme. Faure sing, and afterwards to go to supper at the American Café. To like cottage life, one must have been born to it. I did not begin early enough, and should never grow accustomed to it. Marry an Englishwoman, if you want to go in for that sort of thing."

"I don't care for Englishwomen."

"There you are; and you want to acclimatise a French girl to your fine country. Well, we will go together and look for one, but I tell you plainly that it will be a failure."

Mowbridge's face lengthened; he swallowed three bumpers of brandy, one after the other, and relapsed into an uneasy silence. The bank notes still lay on the table, and Malvina began to fear that he would not take them. "Drop all these ideas of domestic bliss, we are neither of us made for it. Let us stay and amuse ourselves in Paris, and have a good time of it, as long as the money lasts, and afterwards we shall see what we shall do. You complain that the bargain is not a good one; why, here are ten thousand francs waiting for you to put them into your pocket, and to-morrow you will have fifteen thousand more; and here am I ready to have a spree with John Mowbridge for quite an indefinite time, and yet you are not happy. On my word you are hard to please. If you loved me as much as you pretend, I am sure that you wouldn't think twice on the matter, and I tell you, without any more beating about the bush, that your hesitation begins to annoy me; besides, I am in a hurry, so decide quickly. If you refuse to do what I ask, don't let us say any more about it, and I will arrange some other way."

"Swear that you will be mine," said Mowbridge suddenly.

"I swear; and now, old man, swear in your turn that Snowflake shall be beaten in the race for the Produce Stakes. You may use what means you like to bring it about."

"Done, he shall lose. I have given you my word, and the devil take me if I don't keep it."

"That's right, pocket the notes."

Mowbridge at last brought himself to do so, saying :
"When shall I see you again?"

"To-morrow, of course. Not on the course, though; people would notice us, and they might talk; besides, I don't intend to dine with you in your jacket and boots. After the race, go and change your dress, and wait for me at six o'clock in the Champs Elysées, between the Palace of Industry and the Rotunda of the Panorama. Hardly anyone passes there. I will bring you the balance due to you, fifteen thousand francs, and then, my boy, love—joy—and happiness."

"Yes, I trust so," answered the jockey, devouring Malvina with his eyes, who congratulated herself on having concluded the bargain so well.

And now it was time for this astute young lady to go and render an account of her embassy to Oxwall. She called the waiter, settled the account, and whispering to the unhappy John, so that her lips brushed his dry, tanned cheek, said, "Thanks, old man, you shall not find me ungrateful. We will live in Paris like a pair of turtle doves. I snap my fingers at the Registrar, who is not going to marry us, and a fig for the country cottage in England."

After this tender leave-taking there was nothing else for her but to go, and once outside the café, she hastened to Montholon Square, by the Rue Denain and the Rue Lafayette. She was late for her appointment, for the conversation at breakfast had taken up more time than she had anticipated, and two o'clock struck as she left it, but she arrived at her destination quickly. On reaching the square she perceived Oxwall standing on the pavement talking to a gentleman, whom she did not at first recognise, as his back was turned to her. Malvina was too knowing to go up to the bookmaker when he was speaking to a stranger. She therefore stopped short some thirty paces off, and waited until they had finished. She soon saw Oxwall's companion get into a victoria, which was standing a little distance off; as he did so, Malvina for the first time caught a glimpse of his face, and could hardly believe her eyes when she recognised the Count de Sartilly. What could he want to say to Oxwall, who was plotting his ruin? But before she could solve the riddle, the bookmaker saw her, and came up. "Well?" asked he, with an inquiring look.

"The trick is done," answered she. "I had no end of trouble, but I managed it at last. He has taken the money on account, and he has promised to make the horse lose in some way or other; he told me that there were three or four dodges that he was up to."

"I know them all. It does not signify which he tries as

long as he succeeds. The question is whether he is going to play square. What do you think?"

"On my faith I think he is all right, he will keep his word, and I fear I must keep mine. You don't know what I had to promise him. Ah, no one can say that I don't risk something when I start on such an expedition."

"You shall be well rewarded. To-morrow, after the last race, come and see me in the corner behind the Stands, and then, if Snowflake is beaten I will give you twenty-five thousand francs, of which ten thousand are for yourself."

"What will please me more than anything will be to see the face Sartilly will make. Tell me, was it not he that was talking to you just now?"

"Ah, you recognised him, did you? Yes; he was driving past, and seeing me seated on a bench, he called me up to him to ask me a question about the odds."

Oxwall took care not to tell the truth, which was that the Count de Sartilly had called him to pay him the eighty-five thousand francs which he had just drawn from the Comptoir d'Escompte, with a cheque signed *Vacheron*.

"You will have served him out nicely," said Malvina, with a smile; "if he only guessed your little game."

"But he does not, thanks, my girl," said Oxwall, abruptly turning towards the Madeleine.

Mlle. Martingale made no effort to follow him, but said to herself: "Now I see the whole plant; both Sartilly and Oxwall are in the swim. A fine thing, indeed, when an owner makes arrangements for nobbling his own horse. I've got him now, though; and if he ventures to be insolent to me again I can shut him up."

Malvina was wrong. Gontran and Oxwall were not confederates; but it was sufficient for her to believe it, to bring about the terrible scene which later on worked the ruin of Valentine's guilty husband.

CHAPTER XXVIII

AN AMICABLE ARRANGEMENT

GONTRAN had lost no time since he had received the letter which Lisa had brought him, containing amicable propositions from M. Vacheron. He had answered it at once, as his father-in-law had insisted on his doing, and therefore sent the few lines written on a leaf torn from his pocket-book.

These lines simply said that the next day by twelve o'clock M. Vacheron should receive the written promise of the Count, by which he accepted all the conditions laid down. Sartilly had looked upon the matter as settled, and had lost no time in telling Oxwall that he was not going to carry out the agreement entered into between them at the Horse Show. Nothing therefore remained but to settle with the ex-contractor, and the Count then perceived a difficulty which he had not anticipated. In what terms could he draw up the agreement which M. Vacheron exacted. It was not a deed of partnership like that which he had signed with Saint Senier. The convention between father and son-in-law had nothing in common with those documents which solicitors draw up. It was quite impossible to use other agreements as a guide, and an entirely new line must be adopted ; then again, what suited Gontran might not please Vacheron, who was the master of the situation, since it rested with him to furnish the money of which Sartilly had such pressing need. If therefore Vacheron did not accept what his son-in-law drew up delay would ensue, which would be most prejudicial to him. One thing seemed to him perfectly certain ; that such an important document could not be entrusted to the post, and that if he wanted the matter to be concluded at once he must, although he felt a great repugnance to it, treat personally with M. Vacheron, for it would be impossible to employ any third person as an ambassador between them. The thing that astonished him more than anything was the postscript which Valentine had added to the letter, and in which she openly espoused the cause of her father, and that for the first time since her marriage, for she had hitherto always endeavoured to find excuses for her husband. This was an awkward display of feeling on her part, but Gontran did not yet look upon himself as beaten. If he had lost the

first game he might win the second, could he but succeed in seeing his wife ; the only chance he had of doing so was to visit the house in which she had resided ever since she had abruptly left her own.

He therefore made up his mind to go there after having destroyed the bridge behind him by breaking with Oxwall, he had nothing to do but to wait for the decisive morrow, and therefore only sought for something to fill up the time. Sartilly was not one of those men who go to bed to recruit their strength. He dined merrily with his partner, Saint Senior, and about midnight sat down to baccarat. There he had a run of good luck, and at an early hour in the morning he got up from the table largely a winner. He slept until ten the next morning, then rose, dressed, and drove to the Rue de la Neva.

He had calculated on reaching the house at breakfast-time, and had hoped that his wife, who no doubt was expecting his arrival, would arrange to be present at the interview ; or at any rate to appear, if it was only for a moment. He even flattered himself that hearing his carriage she might show herself at the window. On alighting from his carriage he looked up, but his first illusion was at once dissipated, for there was no one looking out. Getting over his disappointment, he entered the house calmly, and was about to ascend the staircase without saying a word to the porter, when a door on the ground floor opened, and M. Vacheron appeared. He had evidently watched for his son-in-law's arrival through the windows of his study ; and this precaution showed that he intended to receive him in the strictest privacy, for he evidently distrusted his daughter's firmness, and was determined to prevent her meeting her husband. The Count, though much put out, knew how to dissimulate his annoyance, and bowed to M. Vacheron, who silently made him a sign to come into the room. When they were both seated at a writing-table Gontran broke the silence : " I presume that you expected me," said he.

The only reply of M. Vacheron was to place before his son-in-law a sheet of stamped paper, covered with writing.

" Ah ! " said the Count, a little taken aback by this mode of proceeding, " this is the agreement, is it ? " and he proceeded to peruse it. It ran thus :—

" I, the undersigned, Gontran, Count de Sartilly, acknowledge having received from M. Vacheron, my father-in-law, the sum of two hundred thousand francs by a cheque on the Comptoir d'Escompte, to which sum I have no legal right, and it will remain to my debit if I break the agreement here-in-under laid down.

"In exchange for the above-named sum, for which this shall be M. Vacheron's receipt, I agree—

"First. Not to bring any action against my wife, Valentine Vacheron, for restitution of conjugal rights, and to permit our relations to remain as they are.

"Second. To quit France within eight days, and not to return there so long as my wife shall live; it being always agreed that whilst I remain abroad I shall draw the whole income accruing from my wife's dowry.

"And it is further understood that if I break any of the terms of this agreement, to which I have given my full assent, my wife shall be perfectly at liberty to sue for a divorce; and to produce this indenture as proof of the facts which she may in so doing advance, so that it may be brought to the knowledge of the Court, that a decree of divorce may be given against me without prejudice to any other legal measures which may be taken against me."

Sartilly read this document in silence, without his face showing any token of his feelings, until he arrived at the last clause of the agreement. "I shall not sign that," said he, and threw the paper on to the table.

"As you like," replied Vacheron, coldly.

"No, I will never sign it," repeated Sartilly.

"Then you had better have remained at home."

"I should never have put myself out of the way to have come here, had I foreseen that you would have caused an agreement to be drawn up in which I acknowledge having committed all sorts of faults."

"Not faults, crimes."

"The more reason then that I should not sign," returned Gontran, insolently.

"Good, I shall save my money then. I prefer that."

The Count bit his lips. He had not expected that his father-in-law would display so much firmness, and Valentine, who from her weakness might have been an efficient ally, was not present.

"I had decided," said he at length, "to have accepted the proposals contained in your letter of yesterday, for I could see that it was impossible for your daughter and I to live together any longer. It was therefore, best that we should arrange for a friendly separation, and as it would be most painful for me to meet my wife leaning on the arm of another—a wife, remember, that I still adore," said Sartilly raising his voice.

"It is no good to speak so loud," interrupted Vacheron. "She cannot hear you, and it is useless to begin playing the old part again, for that is a thing of the past. You

would be hissed in it, for my daughter is perfectly aware of your sentiments towards her."

Gontran received this heavy blow without flinching.

"If Valentine were only here," thought he, "things would be different;" but unfortunately she was not, so he continued: "I therefore resigned myself to leave Paris, and to live abroad, provided that I should be enabled to keep up my position; but I cannot sign a declaration that I have committed a crime."

"That is not down."

"It is the same as if it were. The judges to whom you might show this charming document would look upon it as a confession."

"They would understand it a great deal better if I showed them the bill, at the foot of which you had forged your wife's name."

"That is false," said Gontran, without a moment's hesitation.

"Do you dare to deny it," cried Vacheron.

"Absolutely, and so did Valentine. The man who presented the bill told me all that passed, and I will call him as a witness if necessary."

"And I will say that my daughter had pity on you, that she thought of the honour of the name she bore, and that to prevent the usurer who had lent you the money from prosecuting you, she acknowledged the signature as hers. I guessed her generous intention, I paid the bill, and I do not regret having done so, for I now hold in my hands a sure proof, and if you force me I will lay it before a Court of Justice."

"And do you for a moment think that the Public Prosecutor will believe that you would have paid three hundred and fifty thousand francs to bearer, if the bill had been a false one?"

"I will tell him why I withdrew it. Magistrates know what is due to the respectability of a name, and they will understand me. The signature, too, shall be examined by experts in handwriting, who will compare the supposed signature of my daughter's with your endorsement, and they will have no hesitation in saying that they have both been executed by the same hand. I saw it myself at once, though I am not an expert by profession."

"Certainly you are not, and that is why you are wrong, an expert would judge differently."

"Then you persist in refusing the arrangement that I propose."

"I would accept it if it were differently worded. There is a clause too much; suppress it and I sign."

"I will suppress nothing ; besides, what objection can you have to signing a paper which no one will see, unless indeed you do not intend to be bound by it ?"

"But I do ; but what guarantee have I that you and your daughter will not at once sue for a divorce ; or that I shall regularly receive the income from the settlement."

"I suppose you do not ask me to have the deed registered. That would not make it any more valuable. Will you not be content with the two hundred thousand francs, and my word ?"

This speech recalled to Sartilly the real position in which he stood. He had endeavoured to intimidate his father-in-law by sheer audacity, but he felt that if during the interview he did not get his money, he was a lost man. His credit would be lost, and he would be at the bookmaker's mercy. Sooner then, let him remain in the hands of Valentine's father, who after all was an honest man. The firmness of the ex-contractor triumphed over the cunning of the embarrassed gentleman.

"Decide, quickly," said Vacheron. "I consented to see you, because there was no help for it ; but this interview will be the last one that I grant you. If you leave without signing I shall burn this document for which I shall have no further use, and act at once."

"What do you mean by 'act at once' ?"

"I will answer you without mincing matters at all. I shall go straight to my solicitor and with my daughter's consent, institute proceedings for a divorce. In support of it I shall produce the forged bill, with a full explanation of my reasons for paying it ; and so that he may be thoroughly prepared I shall tell him all the events that happened on the night when my daughter left her home ; the door broken in by your orders, the glass of water poisoned by a jade in your employ, and the will left on the table."

"I do not understand what you mean," stammered Gontran, but his pallor gave the lie to his words.

"Do not attempt to justify yourself, and believe me, do not drive me too far. I know everything, and can lay my hands on witnesses whenever I choose."

"They would find it hard to prove anything," muttered Gontran.

"That is a point which I shall not argue with you. I have nothing further to say, let us finish, my time is valuable."

Sartilly felt that he could offer no further opposition, but for form's sake, he answered, in a cold tone, "I am not at all alarmed by your threats, sir, and were it not for my wife's

sake I should not hesitate to accept your declaration of war, but as it would be much more injurious to her than to me, I accept your conditions."

"Then sign this document."

"First I must have some information. How shall I draw my money?"

"Do not speak of your money! but there, it is useless to argue. I will open a credit for you at the banker's in the town where you may elect to reside, and pay in to your credit every three months the sum you are entitled to."

"You leave me the choice of my place of residence."

"Yes, so long as it is out of France, and the further off it is, the better pleased I shall be. I don't forbid your settling in Japan, or Saint Francisco, if you like; but as I said, every three months I will pay seventy-five thousand francs to your credit, unless you break the agreement, and attempt to return to France. I shall hear of it and the allowance will be stopped."

"Then you are going to have me watched?"

"I don't object to your moving about," continued Vacheron, paying no attention to the ironical question of his son-in-law. "I have given you a week in which to leave Paris, therefore you must be away before seven days have elapsed; all you have to do therefore is to let me know the name of the town where you first arrange to stop."

"London, most probably."

"Very well, London be it. I ought to have stipulated that it should be Pekin, but I won't go from my word. On your arrival you will get a draft on the Bank of England for seventy-five thousand francs; you will receive another on the 1st of August, and so on."

"Shall I be permitted to write to my wife?" asked Sartilly, who was always endeavouring to keep up the same pretence.

"I cannot prevent your doing so," answered Vacheron, in icy tones, "but I warn you that your letters will be returned unopened, for you have nothing to hope for from her."

Sartilly began to think that Valentine would never yield to him again, and the reign of sentiment was over for ever. Therefore all that was left to him was to make the most of the situation in which he found himself placed.

"And now," said the old man, "let us make an end of this. Here is an open cheque on the Comptoir d'Escompte for two hundred thousand francs, payable to bearer; I will hand it to you, as soon as you have put your name at the bottom of this paper."

The sight of this cheque removed Gontran's last scruples;

he seized the pen, signed, took the cheque, and putting on his hat left without another word. On getting into his carriage he again looked up, and he fancied that he could see, through the open venetian blinds on the first floor, someone looking at him.

It was however but a fleeting vision, and before Gontran de Sartilly had the time to make a sign or utter a sound, the shadow, which had shown itself for a moment, disappeared. For an instant he thought of re-entering the house, and running hastily up to the first floor, where perhaps a door might have been opened to him, but to do this he must have passed M. Vacheron's study, while it would have caused a disagreeable scene, and this was not the moment to expose himself to anything of the kind.

To cash the cheque was the main thing at present, but he felt certain that Valentine, hidden behind the blind, had wished to gaze on him for the last time, and the reason that she had not met him was because she feared her own weakness. All hope therefore had not fled, and better opportunities might present themselves.

The degrading agreement that he had signed did not weigh very heavily on his spirits, for he never for a moment intended to carry it out. He did not at all mind leaving for London in eight days. He would tell Saint Senior that he was going to look at a horse that he had heard of. On the first of May he would draw his quarter's allowance at the Bank of England, and after that he would act as events occurred. At any rate he had eight days in which to turn himself round, and to-morrow he was going to win the great Produce Stakes, by which he would gain a large sum of money, and be able to make head against the attacks of the ex-contractor. The agreement which he had signed was after all nothing but a scrap of paper with no other value than simply to prove that differences existed in his, as well as in other families, and with this the criminal law would have nothing to do; as for a civil process, even if this bill was produced the matter would never come to trial, as the affair would certainly be arranged, and so he felt that he had no reason to fear even if he did not carry out his agreement. During the week which still remained to him he fully intended to attempt to renew relations with his wife. Sartilly had this quality in common with great generals, he always maintained his position as long as there was the smallest chance of success; and a repulse, far from disheartening him, only rendered him more enterprising. He had no difficulty in getting the money from the Comptoir d'Escompte, and the sight of the banknotes renewed his courage. He could now get free

from Oxwall, and the most imminent danger was warded off; and there was nothing to prevent his making a magnificent success with his horse, without risking himself in the dangerous [→]raud proposed by the bookmaker. Now Snowflake could run on the square. Oxwall had been warned the evening before that the Count would not make use of the narcotic drug; he therefore could say nothing, for he would have plenty of time to turn himself round in. All that Sartilly had to do was to pay him his four thousand louis, which he had promised to do before the famous Produce Stakes were run for. Oxwall might feel angry with him for having broken off the arrangement at the last minute, and might even have spread those reports which Saint Senier had spoken of, and which had sent the horse back in the betting. Sartilly therefore determined, more firmly than ever, to keep guard over the horse himself, so that no one could get near the horse the night before the race, except his boy and the jockey.

CHAPTER XXIX

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING

AFTER he had left the bank Gontran felt excessively hungry. The successful termination of his negotiation had given him an appetite, and as it was twelve o'clock, the hour for breakfast had arrived. He therefore drove to the Café Anglais where he met one of his club acquaintances, Alfred de Mussidan, a very pleasant fellow. They began to talk about horses and women. Mussidan asserted that Snowflake was still first favourite, and that his victory was a certainty; he had laid heavily on Snowflake, and made sure of winning. This was a topic which was most agreeable to Sartilly, and put him in a good temper, and the breakfast went on merrily; he fancied, however, that his friend was pumping him as to his impression regarding his horse's chance, and Sartilly eagerly seized the opportunity to silence all hostile regrets by declaring that Snowflake was in perfect condition and could easily walk away from all his opponents; for he knew that Mussidan, who was extremely well known throughout the sporting world, would repeat this communication everywhere, and in this he was not deceived. Mussidan was on his way to Chantilly, to see some horse in training there, and he gratefully accepted Gontran's offer to give him a lift to the

Northern Station. After shaking hands with his friend at the door of the ticket office, Gontran who did not for a moment imagine that within a few paces of him his own jockey Mowbridge was being cajoled by a designing woman in the pay of the treacherous Oxwall, drove down the Rue Lafayette, and perceived the bookmaker himself, seated on a chair in Montholon Square. Yielding to a sudden impulse Gontran called to his coachman to stop, without for a moment debating whether it would not have been better to have waited for the next day to have met his creditor on the course. He called the bookmaker, who came up to him at once, and the following interesting dialogue ensued.

"You got my letter?"

"Yes, Count," answered Oxwall, politely. "It pleased and saddened me at the same time. Pleased me, because it showed me that you were in a position to clear off your obligations to me, and saddened me, because I had to renounce an operation which would have made us both rich."

"Very sorry, my dear fellow, but I wouldn't run the risk of compromising myself even to be agreeable to you. I had agreed hardly knowing why I did so, but I afterwards reflected and changed my mind. I told you of this alteration in good time, and I therefore hope that we shall still be good friends."

"Certainly, Count; I shall always feel honoured by your business, and to lay you what you like, only I can't hide from you that your defection has cost me a good deal. I had laid against Snowflake since our last interview, and I don't know whether I shall be able to hedge at Longchamps, so as to cover my loss."

"You will not find that hard, as there are all sorts of rumours flying about regarding the horse. All are false, of course; but I cannot trace the source from which they have emanated. At any rate, he has gone back in the betting, so my partner tells me."

"Ah! it was M. de Saint Senier that told you; then I can understand it. He has backed the horse heavily, and he hopes, by depreciating him, to get on at a better price. I myself wouldn't lay against him any more at any odds; and I confess that if I was in M. de Saint Senier's place I should do the same. At any rate, you have consoled me a little by telling me that you will be able to settle up, for I can tell you that my losses will be heavy."

"As I have met you, I may as well do so at once," said Sartilly, putting his hand into his pocket, which was swollen with bank-notes, and taking out the sum in which he was indebted to the bookmaker.

Oxwall took them with a satisfaction which he did not attempt to dissimulate ; and stowing them away said, with a half-ironical smile, " I congratulate you, Count. You seem to have been pulling them in a bit, and I hope to-morrow that you will double your capital. Back your horse for as much as you can. Not with me ; for, as I had the honour to tell you just now, I wouldn't lay against him at any price, even at ten to one, were it only for five louis, so sure am I that he will win the Great Produce Stakes." Of all the means of deception, the simple lie is the most efficacious. Oxwall was perfectly convinced that Snowflake would be beaten, thanks to Mowbridge's intended treachery ; and yet at the moment he spoke he had not received the report of his ambassadress ; but then he was thoroughly acquainted with the character and disposition of the jockey, and he did not therefore run a great risk in holding the reassuring language that he did, to the man that he intended to ruin. The wily Malvina was not far off, for she had left the *café* before the Count arrived at the Northern Station. He had passed her both going and returning, and might have recognised her, for he knew her by sight from having often met her at the various racecourses. But to-day he was in his carriage, and she on foot, and he disdained to cast his eyes on the passers-by, even on pretty women, if they walked on foot instead of riding in their carriages. But she had seen him talking to the bookmaker, and, like the sharp girl she was, had refrained from showing herself until he had left.

The Count was most desirous of going to see the horse which the evening before he was ready to drug, even at the risk of poisoning it ; so he drove straight to the Madrid Restaurant without going home first. It was a well-chosen time for his visit, for few people were about, and he had no wish for idlers of his acquaintance to hook themselves on to him. He certainly ran the chance of meeting both Saint Senier and his wife at the stables, as the latter had manifested a desire to see the horse ; but he hoped to be there before them. He did get there before them, or anyone else. Snowflake was alone in charge of his lad, a youth of eighteen, who answered to the name of Dick, who was English, born and bred on the estate of Lord Winter, from whom the horse had been purchased. A boy is not of much account in the stable, and yet on him depends the health of a future Derby winner, for it is his duty to look after him continually by day as well as night, to take him out to exercise, to groom him, and to give him his feeds.

The horse has a strong instinct of gratitude, and if he is well treated by him, he will take a great liking to his boy,

which the latter returns, and there is as much good feeling between them as between a good master and an attached servant.

This was the case with Dick and Snowflake. Dick had known him, from a foal, and had never been away from him. They had crossed to France in the same boat, and had lived for three months at the stud farm at Mortcerf, and from thence had come to Paris in the same horse-box.

Sartilly appreciated the merits of the boy, and counted greatly on him to guard Snowflake from all malevolent attacks, and he had often wondered when he had made up his mind to administer a narcotic to the horse, how he could have evaded the jealous watchfulness of the boy! Dick, however, did not like his new masters; he hated Saint Senior, who treated him harshly, and he had other reasons for disliking Sartilly. An Englishman to the core, the boy did not think that these gentlemen possessed the calm dignity of manner which is the distinguishing mark of an English nobleman, and therefore he regretted Lord Winter, whose orders he had obeyed in entering the service of the French gentlemen, and his most ardent wish was to return to England. Nor did he like Mowbridge much better although he was his countryman, and Sartilly who had noticed this, was not ill-pleased, for he thought that there was the less chance of their planning any scheme together.

He found Dick rubbing down Snowflake who had just come in after a short gallop, and to make a favourable impression on the lad, he laid his hand familiarly on his shoulder, and said, "Well, my boy, what do you think of the colt?"

"Nothing," answered the boy in his native tongue, for though he understood French, he disliked to talk it.

"Is he in good form?" asked Sartilly, without getting angry.

"Perfect."

"Then to-morrow he will win easily?"

"I don't know."

"What, you don't know; there isn't a horse in the race that can hold a candle to him."

"That is true."

"Well, what do you mean then?"

"If he is badly ridden, he will be beaten."

"Mowbridge rides better than anyone in England or France."

"Yes, but Mowbridge is a bad lot."

"What, a bad lot, do you say? You mean he gets drunk. I don't care for that, so long as he is not drunk to-morrow, and he never drinks when he is going to ride. That is a

known fact. I had it from Lord Winter, who assured me that he had never seen him take a drop when there was racing on."

"He is a gambler, too," said Dick.

"A gambler? well, perhaps, but what of that, it is his own money that he loses."

"He may play with yours some day."

"I say, youngster, you just tell me what you mean, or I shall have to turn you away."

"Just as you like."

"You don't care then about staying in my service, at least it seems so; well, I don't want to keep you; so after the race I'll pay you your wages, but until then you will continue to look after the horse."

"As you like, sir."

"Why, it is a regular song. This evening you will sleep in the stable."

"I should do so even if you were to forbid it."

"Indeed; and why?"

"Because I am fond of my horse, and don't want anyone to harm him."

"Do you think anyone would try to get at him if you did not keep your eyes open?"

"Perhaps."

"Go to the devil with your short answers. You deserve that I should lay my cane across your shoulders."

"Don't try that on; for I expect I am the stronger of the two."

Sartilly grew furious, and was about to carry his threat into execution, and goodness only knows how the scene would have ended, when M. and Mme. de Saint Senier appeared at the door of the stable. The Viscountess had got back in her husband's good graces by asking him to forgive her for the violent language she had used to Diana de Ganges at the horse show, and Saint Senier, satisfied with having brought her up sharp, had not held out long, and had been so tormented by her, that he had at last yielded to her solicitations to take her to the Madrid, so as to have a little peace. She came dressed in her loudest costume, and more than ever disposed to speak ill of her neighbour, Valentine; but at the first word she said Saint Senier checked her so sharply that she changed her note, and went off into an ecstasy regarding the beauties of Snowflake, making most preposterous mistakes, as she knew nothing at all about horses, and Sartilly took advantage of this interruption to leave the place. He did not care about confiding to his partner the opinion which the free-spoken Dick had formed

about Mowbridge, but he promised to himself to give that young man, in the evening, the lesson which the entrance of the Viscount and Viscountess had interrupted. "You know that our horse is going up again fast in the betting," said Saint Senier to him, as he was taking leave.

"I shall be present at Snowflake's victory," said Mme. de Saint Senier drawing herself up, as if such a piece of intelligence ought to have transported Gontran to the seventh heaven ; whereas he always fled from the woman as if she was an embodiment of the plague. "We shall meet on the course, I hope."

"I shall be charmed, my dear Madame," answered Gontran, curtly, "and I regret that I must leave you so quickly ; but I am waited for, and the mare that I am driving is so timid that I do not care to delay until the roads are crowded. There might be an accident."

"Then, my dear fellow, you would do well to get off at once," said Saint Senier.

"Don't go round by Auteuil," interposed his wife who could not keep her tongue quiet, "for Mlle. de Ganges is always riding about the neighbourhood, and I suppose that you don't want to come across her. The Bois is not safe since this stealer of hearts goes about it ; on my word, they ought to give notice to the police."

Certainly the Viscountess was an incorrigible scandal-monger. Her husband had no desire to begin the scene at the horse show over again, but he cast so threatening a glance at her, that she at once became silent.

Gontran, leaving his partner to continue if he wished the conversation with Dick, hurried to his carriage which was waiting for him near the Madrid. By her uncalled-for allusion Mme. de Saint Senier had only meant to gratify her spite against Diaua de Ganges, but she never thought that by it, she would have aroused in Gontran's heart the recollection of days that had past. Overwhelmed as he had been by troubles of various descriptions, Gontran had almost forgotten his wife's former companion, but he had never renounced his project of conquering the obstinacy with which she had met his proposals. Now that he was separated from Valentine, he had no more outward show to maintain, and it flashed across his mind that it would be a nice little bit of revenge to carry off the woman with the auburn hair, and emerald eyes. He did not wish to make any pretence of running after her ; knowing by experience that women only cared for those who disdain, or at least effect to disdain them ; but he would have been glad of a chance meeting, and Mme. de Saint Senier had pointed out a method to him of doing so.

The Bois de Boulogne at certain times is excessively convenient for meetings, either in carriages, on horseback, or on foot, but it also has the disadvantage, owing to its winding roads, and thick clumps of trees and bushes, that persons may be close together, and yet never meet.

Besides, entire credence could not be placed in Mme. de Saint Senier's statements, and in this case in particular they had to be taken with some slight reservation. It was not at all certain that Mlle. de Ganges rode about the neighbourhood of Auteuil every day, and if it was so, it was not likely that she was unaccompanied. Her lover no doubt would be with her, and Sartilly had no wish to meet them together. He would have been delighted to have taken her as his mistress, and since the month of February he had more than once thought of using against Valentine the story, now grown rather stale, of the pursuit at night in the garden of his house, and to assert that he had surprised the young creole in her chamber.

He kept this weapon in reserve, as one only to be used as a last resource, for he felt that a quarrel with M. Cézambre, followed by a duel, would only complicate matters, for old Vacheron, if he were pushed much further, might destroy the agreement and drag the persecutor of his daughter before the tribunal of justice.

As these thoughts passed through Gontran's mind, he ordered his coachman to drive round the Bois before returning home, not that he had any hopes of meeting Mlle. de Ganges that day, but he liked to leave things to chance, and as he had plenty of time at his disposal before dining at his club, he determined to take a drive, having decided to return to the Madrid in the evening to look after his horse, and to take up the conversation with Dick, at the point where it had been broken off by the arrival of Saint Senier. Dick had given him something to think about, and Sartilly began to have his doubts of Mowbridge, so he determined to keep good watch that night, and on the racecourse to have a serious conversation with the suspected jockey. Whilst waiting for this, Sartilly could enjoy all the satisfaction that a man feels who has a hundred and twenty notes of a thousand francs each in his pocket, and there was no harm he thought in going in search of an adventure to pass away the time. His coachman turned down the Reine Marguerite road, so as to arrive at the Cascade by passing by the *Pré Catalan*, so as to skirt the Longchamps course, and return to Paris by the road to the Fortifications. Gontran cared little which way he went, as he was in no hurry. His horse, which was very well bred, went at a slow trot, sometimes dwindling

into a walk, for the driver had served the Count long enough to guess what pleased him best.

Gontran was smoking an excellent cigar, and allowed himself to fall into a reverie, contrary to his usual custom, for of all men he was the least given to day-dreams. But the air was so soft and sweet, the sky was so pure, that he felt a pleasure in life, and forgot the difficulties of the present in the golden future that was opening before him. It was indeed the happy hour of a guilty man, an hour which moralists pretend to believe does not exist, and yet which the most hardened criminals sometimes enjoy, those at least who never feel the sting of remorse.

The Bois on the side where Gontran was, is but little frequented, and he only met a few cabs filled with citizens or country people, with every now and then a groom exercising a horse, a riding-master giving a lesson to a pupil, or a gentleman trying the paces of a hack that he had recently purchased. This solitude, and especially the absence of pretty women, finished by giving Sartilly the blues, and he was about to order his coachman to go to Paris when he saw a tall woman, mounted on a dark bay, come out of the Avenue of Saint Cloud. She was going at a walk, and was not sufficiently near for him to distinguish her features, but he could see at a glance that she had a splendid figure, and sat her horse well. In Paris, ladies who ride well are rare, and Sartilly, who was a connoisseur in such matters, saw that this was not a pupil fresh from the riding-school, or a reckless American girl, or a professional from the circus. She sat well, without any stiffness, and seemed as much at her ease in the saddle as though she had been seated in an armchair. Her features however could not be seen, as she wore a thick blue veil. "Ah, well," thought Sartilly, "she will raise it when she passes me. A pretty woman likes to be admired, and if she does not lift it, it is because she is ugly, and in that case I don't care about seeing her." In readiness however for every event, he assumed an attitude likely to attract the attention of the unknown who was about to cross in front of him, and had urged her bay into a long trot; he half stood up in the carriage, and leaned out so much that it was impossible for the fair rider not to notice him; she did so, but the effect was entirely contrary to what she had anticipated. Instead of raising her veil, she started back so violently and drew her reins so tightly, that her horse reared. She kept her seat admirably, and with much skill made her horse twist round on his hind legs, so as to put his head in the contrary direction to the Count's victoria, then giving him his head, touched him with the spur. Unfortunately she

spured him a little too sharply, and the bay, unaccustomed to being so roughly treated, bolted away down the macadamised road. Gontran saw at once that she had lost all command of her horse, and thought that he might readily profit by the accident by giving her assistance, if her headlong course terminated in a fall.

"Follow her," cried he to the coachman, "but don't get too close, or the noise of the wheels will make him go on like a railway train." This order was skilfully obeyed, and Sartilly standing up, was able to follow with his eyes the struggle between a young lady, who had not the iron muscles of a jockey, and an almost thoroughbred horse of an unexceptional vigour. The lady did not appear for a moment to have lost her head. Still sitting firmly down in the saddle instead of wearing herself out by vain efforts to stop her horse by sawing his mouth, she contented herself by endeavouring to keep his head straight, knowing well that he would slacken his speed as he became fatigued. A sensible manœuvre which had every chance of success as the road was wide, and there were no obstacles in it. Unfortunately in one spot the road was being repaired, and a heap of stones at the side of it alarmed the animal. He shied violently into the bushes that fringed the road. "Ah," muttered Gontran between his teeth, who had no pity for an accident caused by awkwardness, "I should have thought that she would have known better. She ought to have foreseen that he would have started at that heap of stones, and kept his head straight."

His indifference, however, did not go so far as to pass by without endeavouring to discover what had become of the veiled rider. He ordered his coachman to stop, and got out of his carriage, more excited by curiosity than by a desire to assist the victim of an accident, to which he had greatly contributed by startling the lady by leaning out of his carriage. He entered the tangle and found her lying with her face on the ground and apparently senseless. The bay had also fallen, having tripped over a stump and pitched on his head; but had recovered himself, and stood by her, snorting and trembling in every limb, as always happens to a horse that has thrown his rider. Gontran bent down, and raising her up recognised the features of Diana de Ganges. Her face was covered with blood which flowed from a wound in her forehead, and she did not manifest the slightest sign of life. Her head had struck against the trunk of a tree, and her skull might be fractured, but her heart still beat, as Gontran assured himself by putting his hand on her breast. Another man would have dispatched his coachman for help, but Sartilly contented himself with summoning him to assist

in lifting the inanimate body into his carriage, for the first idea that had entered into his head was to take advantage of the accident to secure the woman of whom he had been thinking so much, and to play a trick on his detested rival. Diana had been quite alone. She had left at the villa the faithful Domingo who habitually escorted her in her rides. What risk did Sartilly run in carrying her off? Not the slightest. The road was a solitary one. No one had witnessed the accident, and Sartilly could say to himself, "Two things will happen : either she will die in my house after having received all proper attention, or else she will get well there, and cannot fail to be grateful to me for having saved her life, for she will easily understand that it was not my business to take her home to her lover, who is my avowed enemy." This was sound reasoning, and he lost no time in carrying out his plan. The coachman had recognised the ex-companion of the Countess, and thought it natural enough that the Count should take her back to the house.

The first thing to arrange was how to convey the injured woman, who was speechless and motionless, in an open victoria through the Bois without attracting a great deal of attention, but the coachman easily settled this by producing from a locker below his box a quantity of rugs and horse-cloths, destined to be thrown over the mare when waiting anywhere after a long drive. He enveloped Mlle. de Ganges in these from head to foot, and assisted the Count to carry her to the carriage where he placed her like a large parcel, not lying down, but seated on the cushions, leaving room for the Count by her side so that her head might rest on his shoulder. The bay horse was still there ; he had not moved since he had thrown Diana over his head. Sartilly took him by the bridle and, putting his head in the direction of Auteuil and giving him a cut behind, started him off, muttering, "He will easily find his way home, and handsome Cézambre will pass an uncomfortable time when he finds him coming home without his mistress." Sartilly jumped into his victoria and sat down in such a manner as to support the injured woman who was completely concealed by the coverings in which she had been enveloped, and ordered his man to drive fast, avoiding the more frequented roads. The custom-house officials at the barrier seldom examine the private conveyances which return from the Bois, and they did not ask Sartilly to undo the packet that stood by his side in the victoria. On reaching home he told the porter to send up his wife, as she was the only servant of the female sex in the house, for he felt the necessity of keeping up appearances, and that it would never do to put Mlle. de Ganges

to bed himself. Then he had her carried to the rooms which she had formerly occupied when she was the companion of the Countess. There was much excitement in the house when the servants saw the coachman carrying in, the insensible form of Diana, but no one put any questions or asked for any information on the subject. From the commencement the Count had drilled his domestics into serving him silently, and never taking any notice of what they might see or hear.

The injured woman was laid upon the bed that she had formerly occupied, and left alone with the porter's wife, whilst Gontran sent one of the footmen for his own doctor who lived close by in the Rue de Dome, a small street little known but highly respectable, which runs from the Avenue d'Eylau to the Rue Lauriston, and until his arrival he walked about the garden. Gontran had no regrets for the manner in which he had acted, although he had reflected deeply on its possible consequences, and was not at all alarmed at the prospect of any complications arising from sheltering in his house his wife's old friend; he only looked at the possible advantages accruing therefrom. He thought, "What do I care if M. Vacheron and his daughter learn that Diana is here? They will not take advantage of that to make a scandal, unless, indeed, Valentine's jealousy should be aroused, and then I can play a fine card by dismissing her rival. Then, again, if that happens, I shall score by having created a coolness between Diana and her lover, who will never believe that she came here except of her own free will. If I do not leave for England by the next week her lot will be decided, for wounds in the head, if they are not mortal, heal rapidly. If she recovers, I shall not have much trouble in persuading her to follow me, for she will be so compromised as regards George, that she can never go back to him again; at any rate I shall have broken off the alliance between my wife and her." Whilst Sartilly with odious cynicism was congratulating himself on his bad action and his worse intentions, the doctor arrived.

This doctor, whose name was Pontier, was a skilful and a very worthy man, whose only fault was that he was too modest. He did not know how to get up his name as many of his fraternity do by paying for puffs in the newspapers, but for all that he had a very good practice in a wealthy part of the town. Though Gontran cared little for his character, he had the utmost confidence in his science and straight-forwardness. The Countess, too, liked him very much. Pontier was aware that she had left her house suddenly, but being discreet by nature, he had made no

inquiry into the matter, nor did he ask Sartilly how Mlle. de Ganges had met with her accident, but simply begged to see the sufferer, and Gontran took him to her room.

He found that the porter's wife had put her to bed, and had washed away the blood from her face, but had been unable to bring her back to consciousness. Pale as death, and hardly seeming to breathe, the beautiful Diana lay on her back, her exquisite hair forming a halo around her waxen features, whilst her eyes had no expression in them. Even Sartilly had some feelings of regret at seeing her state, for he began to fear that she would never recover her senses. The doctor made a close examination of her, and at last spoke in terms that were not very re-assuring. "The skull is not fractured, but the shock has been so severe that it may result in concussion of the brain. This state of coma may continue for several hours, perhaps even days. We must make use of the strongest possible remedies, and she must have the most constant care. I will send you a nurse accustomed to the care of the sick, and I will stay here to-night. She must have the most absolute quiet, and I must beg you, my dear Count, not to remain near her, for when she recovers consciousness, you will be unable to prevent yourself from talking to her, and that may throw her into a state of mind which I desire to avoid."

Sartilly had no wish to watch by the bedside of a sick person ; he was not of the stuff of which hospital nurses are made, so he willingly promised to be contented with news of the state of Mlle. de Ganges, of whom he spoke with all due respect. The doctor wrote a long prescription, and announced that he would return again in an hour, and Sartilly, on reconducting him to the door, told him that his wife's former companion had fallen from her horse in the Bois de Boulogne, and that as he happened to be on the spot when it occurred, he had had her removed to his house, not knowing where she lived.

M. Pontier did not ask any questions, and went off believing that the story was partially true, but that there was something hidden in the background, into which he had no desire to penetrate. He was a doctor, and nothing but a doctor, and only looked after bodily ills ; those of the heart were out of his province. Sartilly was not the stamp of man to waste his time over an unhappy woman in danger of death. The doctor had forbidden him to enter Diana's room, but there was nothing to prevent his remaining in the house and seeing that everything was done for her, but this he never thought of doing. He called his servants together and gave the order that no one was to be admitted into the house except the

doctor and the nurse. Francis was ordered to see that his master's instructions were properly carried out, and in this Gontran made a bad choice, for the valet was more than ever infatuated with Lisa, and she knew how to make him tell everything. The Count, however, had perfect faith in him. At one time Sartilly had thought of sending for Florence, whom he had sent away the morning after the Countess had left. She was most perfectly trustworthy and incapable of joining in a plot with any of the other servants, who all detested her. But Florence was the holder of a secret of which she might make a bad use, although it was her interest to keep it, and Sartilly, who had hidden her away in a safe place of retirement, preferred to leave her there, from the feeling that it is never well to trust too much to a bad woman, even though she may be your accomplice.

CHAPTER XXX

A RUN OF LUCK

SARTILLY just now felt in need of a little rest after so exciting a day, and he had nothing to do until midnight, when he had made up his mind to return to the Madrid Restaurant, and to remain there until the next morning. He intended before going, however, to return home, and enquire after the health of Mlle. de Ganges, and in case she was sufficiently recovered to write, to give strict instructions to his people to prevent her sending any communication to her lover. He wished to gain a respite of twenty-four hours, and not to see her again until after Snowflake's victory, which would free him from one of his most poignant anxieties. It was his last stake that he was about to play on Sunday at Longchamps, and on the Monday only, would he know whether he was to submit to the conditions which his father-in-law had dictated; or fortified by his heavy winnings on the race, be enabled to resist M. Vacheron, who wanted to starve him into submission. What was he to do with himself on Saturday evening. He might go to the Circus in the Champs Elysées, where, according to custom, the sporting men were in the habit of meeting the evening before the Grand Prix was run for. In former days French and English used to meet together beneath the zinc palm trees of Mabile and exchange greetings, and sometimes blows, but Mabile, which survived three or four governments, has disappeared for some years. Besides,

he did not much care to meet people who could only talk to him about the chances of his horse, so he went to dine at a restaurant where he was not very likely to encounter any of his friends ; and after smoking several cigars, at about ten o'clock he decided to turn into his club, where he thought he should not find anyone to bore him. No doubt, however, it was written that he should not find the calm and solitude that his soul longed for. For no sooner did he enter, than he came across Alfred de Mussidan, who had just driven up from the station, and who brought news of the horses that were in training at Chantilly, with which he plentifully regaled his friend Gontran, who was not the least interested. It was necessary for him, however, to listen and to reply, for Mussidan could not fail shortly to touch upon the morrow's race and Snowflake's chances, on whom he had put a great deal of money. He had also picked up at Chantilly some vague rumours as to the favourite's health and the behaviour of the jockey, which had made him a little uneasy. It was as well to re-assure him on these points, and Sartilly did the best he could to persuade him that the victory of his horse was a matter of certainty. But Mussidan amongst other faults was excessively prolix, and the conversation threatened to be an endless one. In order to rid himself of this bore, Gontran thought of saying that he was going to play whist.

"No chance of that, dear boy," answered Mussidan. "Everyone is in the Red Room, where there is the finest game of baccarat going on that you have ever seen."

"What, at this hour?" cried Gontran.

"Yes, I can understand your being surprised, for it seldom begins before midnight, and for some time past the game has nearly died a natural death. The players did nothing but lose, and got disheartened. You should know that, for you walked into them yesterday."

"Oh ! I only carried off a few hundred louis, and it seems that that hasn't made them give up baccarat, since they have started it again, as soon almost as they have dined."

"By Jove, yes, and it is your partner who began it."

"What ! Saint Senier. Did he dine here?"

"Yes, with a young fellow that he introduced to the club, and who wasn't black-balled because no one knew anything about him ; but I must in justice say that I don't think that there was anything against him."

"Quite a young man—a creole?"

"Yes, I believe he does come from some colony or other. He is quite a green-horn, and has never set foot in Paris before. Saint Senier is showing him about, and Madame, they say, is going to take charge of his education. He is a

wonderful chap that Saint Senier ! if he was not so rich, one would say that his wife fees him for introducing good-looking young fellows to her."

Gontran at once understood how it came that Diana was on that day riding alone in the Bois. Her lover had promised to dine with Saint Senier at the club and had probably passed his afternoon in Paris, and had most likely after dinner returned to the villa, and been both surprised and vexed at not finding Diana there ; then with a bitter smile he thought, "He is hunting for her now, unless indeed he is sitting alone in the house gnawing his fingers with rage and jealousy. Well, let him wait. She won't come back. And this is the beginning of my revenge upon this squire of dames. Decidedly everything is going as I could wish."

"Besides," continued Mussidan, "the club has made an acquisition in the shape of this youth ; report says that he is very rich and he plays heavily, so that he may console some of the losers, and there are those who have great need of it, for they are pretty well drained dry."

"Unless he completely finishes them. We must see to that."

"You can do so at once, for he has the bank now."

"What, has he remained here ?" exclaimed Sartilly, much surprised.

"Certainly, and he doesn't seem at all inclined to move. He is winning all round."

For an instant Sartilly was silent, then a bright idea flashed across him, "I am in luck too," thought he, "and nothing would please me better than to win some of this green-horn's money ; so that after having won his money, and carried away his mistress, my revenge would be complete."

"He is only at his second deal," added Mussidan, "and has already more than fifteen hundred louis before him. But the fun of the whole thing is that Saint Senier is dropping his money. The husband cleaned out by the lover, that is a good joke, but you must pay to see it, dear boy."

"And so I will. Let us go into the Red Room. I may bring my partner better luck."

"He will want all his luck to-morrow at Longchamps," said Mussidan, who was always thinking of the money he had on Snowflake.

Sartilly looked at the clock : he had still an hour to spare before he had to leave to look after the injured woman and his horse, and it would not take so long as that to break George's hitherto victorious bank. He therefore followed his friend into the card-room. No one paid any attention to them. The players looked at nothing but the cards, and a thunderbolt might have fallen on the table without put-

ting them to flight. There they were, about twenty of them ; some sitting down, others standing up, staking their money obstinately ; as silent as priests, and as grave as augurs. The game was too serious to allow any one to jest, or even to speak. All that was heard was an exclamation when any wonderful point was scored. The one who was the least excited of the lot was George Cézambre ; it was a strange picture to gaze on, this mere boy of twenty dealing the cards with the carelessness of the creole, and to see him smile when he lost, which however did not often occur. His coolness and his air of indifference exasperated the veteran punters, who had taken him for an easy prey but discovered that they had found their master. Saint Senier was a curious sight to the observer. He could not understand seeing his stakes of five hundred francs continually being raked in, and swelling the heap of coin and notes spread out before his young friend the banker. He moved from one side of the bank to the other, sometimes staking on the right and sometimes on the left, but always losing, for his customary good luck seemed to have deserted him. The lookers-on began to believe that his wife was leading a reformed life, but the Count knew better, and began to regret having proposed George as a member of the club.

Sartilly prepared to take part in the performance. His pockets were filled with notes, which he had omitted to lock up during the short time that he remained in his own house, and he did not care to exchange any of them for counters with the cashier of the club, as that might have necessitated his re-converting them into specie on his departure. He wanted to be at perfect liberty to play a bold game, and not to prolong the sitting.

"Five hundred louis," exclaimed he, throwing down the bank-notes on the table. Gontran had spoken so loudly in calling his stake that many of the punters turned round, and congratulated themselves on their new ally ; for Sartilly had the reputation of being a fortunate player, and the chances might turn in their favour if they had him amongst them.

His voice rang out full of hatred and bitterness, and made George Cézambre raise his head, and perceive this new adversary seated between the short-tempered Colonel Tarsac, and a worthy gentleman from Angers, who was playing his maiden game of baccarat. The two opponents scowled at each other, but George continued to deal the cards without showing any other sign of concern. He turned up nine, and a storm of curses arose from all sides. Saint Senier, who lost a thousand francs on the left, at the

same time that Gontran dropped his ten thousand on the right, cried out in despair to his partner on the other side of the table:

"Faith, my dear fellow, if you have more money about you than you know what to do with, you have come to the right place, for no one does anything but lose at this infernal game."

The Colonel raged and swore like a heathen, and the gentleman from Angers began to wonder whether the money that he had brought up for a two months' sojourn in Paris was not going to melt away between his fingers before the rise of another sun.

George gathered his gains together, without the slightest sign of triumph. Calm as a veteran gambler who is neither excited by good or bad fortune, he waited with a smile on his lips for his opponents to stake, but the discouraged punters were in no hurry to lay down their money.

Even Saint Senier hesitated. Irritated at the coolness of Mlle. de Ganges' lover, and feeling that all the players were watching him, as soldiers awaiting the signal for attack, Sartilly threw another packet of notes on the table, which had the same fate as its predecessor. This time, however, the gain of the bank was not so complete, and was more vigorously disputed. The players on the left had eight, and Saint Senier who had not staked, ground his teeth. Those on the right had seven, and naturally stood on it. George had six, but he took a card without hesitation, and turned up a three, which made the conquering nine. This was enough to disgust anyone with striving against a man who possessed such extraordinary luck; and some even ventured to suspect his fair play, though they did not dare to give their thoughts words. The game continued, and Sartilly again risked a stake of five hundred louis, which rather surprised the lookers-on, for everyone knew that he had been in great straits lately, and had not heard that he had since had a stroke of luck.

"He is going to put on again," sighed Saint Senier, thinking of the future of their partnership.

George Cézambre, calm and impassible as ever, was drawing a card from the pack, when one of the waiters brought him a letter on a silver salver. George took it, but out of courtesy placed it by his side without reading it.

"Is that a *fetish*?" asked one of the discontented losers.

"Read it," exclaimed Saint Senier, "you can deal afterwards." Vexed at the uncivil remark which he had caught, George complied with Saint Senier's request. He opened the letter, read the contents at a glance, and laid down the pack, which he held in his hand.

"You must excuse me, gentlemen," said he, preparing to rise, "but I must leave at once."

A confused noise of cursing and expostulation arose.

"You have no right to do so, the deal has commenced."

"It is a nice thing to bolt after having won all our money." George hardly seemed to understand, but he did not appear disposed to obey such requests couched in such discourteous language.

"Gentlemen," said Saint Senier, who was a recognised authority in baccarat, "a banker has always the right to leave off when he has had enough, but he must complete any deal that has been commenced, and this is the case at present, as the money has been staked."

"Very good," replied George, glad by any means to shorten a discussion which delayed his departure. He dealt, turned up his cards, and displayed a five of spades and a four of hearts, making the nine points, and after having seen that both the right and left sides had *bac*, he rose from the table.

"I have complied with the rules," said he in a loud voice, "and now I am going; any one who has any complaint to make can easily find me."

"You are forgetting your money," exclaimed Saint Senier.

Without another word, George picked up the gold, the notes, and the counters, and thrusting them into his pocket anyhow, left the Red Room. No one had taken up the gage that he had thrown down, but as soon as he had gone, ill-natured remarks began to fly about.

"One is never too old to learn," remarked the Colonel, "and this is a thing that I have not seen before."

"A little dodge," remarked another, "is very simple and easy of performance. You give a hint to a friend, who sends you a letter just at the right moment. When you get it you pull a long face as if your father had just died, and make off with your winnings."

"Yes, it does away with the necessity for giving losers their revenge."

"Gentlemen," remarked Saint Senier, gravely, "as M. Cézambre's proposer, I think that I ought to protest against this unfair interpretation of his conduct."

"A fine present you have made to us in getting him elected."

"I repeat that he is incapable of acting a part for the sake of obtaining a pretext to leave off playing. Remember that it would be impossible for him to know that he would be so large a winner at the moment he received the letter."

"How can you tell? He perhaps knew that he should win. I confess that I distrust a man who deals himself a six on which anyone would stand, and then a three, when there were five chances to one against him."

"Then," asked Saint Senier, sharply, to the last speaker, "you accuse M. Cézambre of cheating?"

"No," answered several voices.

"I warn those who accuse him, that they must first settle the matter with me. For, as his proposer, I consider myself responsible for the acts of this young man; and afterwards with him, for he himself said that he was ready to account for his actions to anyone."

This declaration produced a dead silence, and Saint Senier continued: "It is very disagreeable to lose one's money, but we ought to be able to do so without complaining over it. M. Cézambre has won three hundred and fifty louis of me, and I look on it as mere chance; and if you would only keep cool, you would think as I do, that he has most likely received some distressing news, bad news, which he had certainly not looked for."

"Where from? From Mauritius, eh?" sneered one of the angry losers.

"Ask him yourself, and oblige me by changing the conversation," answered Saint Senier, angrily.

There was one present who, had he liked, could have solved the whole mystery at once; for Sartilly had no difficulty in guessing that the letter received by George had come from Auteuil, and informed the poor boy that Mlle. de Ganges, who had gone out shortly after noon, had not returned at eleven o'clock at night; perhaps even the letter said that the bay horse had come back to the stable alone, and that some mishap must have befallen Diana who had been riding him. As Sartilly thought that this news must have driven his rival to despair, he almost consoled himself for having lost to him fifteen hundred louis, in the space of a few minutes. This loss however had made a large breach in his finances, since out of the two hundred thousand francs which he had received from Vacheron, there now only remained ninety thousand. But instead of taking this as a warning that Fortune was turning her back on him, Gontran's only thought was to recoup himself. "Come, do not let it be said that play shall cease because one gentleman has left us," cried one of the most inveterate gamblers.

"Who will bid for the bank?" cried several others.

"I will make one of a thousand louis," answered Sartilly.

No one disputed it with him. Alfred de Mussidan was very rich, but he was not a gambler, and there was hardly

anyone but Saint Senior who played deeply, and he had resolved not to stake for fear of contributing to his partner's ruin. Sartilly therefore had to contend against a number of men who played for small stakes such as fifteen louis, rather different from the heavier betting of ten thousand francs which had just been going in at the table. From the very beginning fortune declared against the banker. When George Cézambre quitted his seat he had taken the luck away with him. The combat was a long one, and Saint Senior, heart-broken, did not await its conclusion, but crept away quietly at about two in the morning, dreading that his partner should smash up financially, and much pre-occupied with the doings of the morrow. Sartilly kept up the struggle until he left his last bank note on the table ; and as the day began to break he left the field from want of ammunition. Tempted by the Demon of Play, Sartilly had forgotten everything ; Diana perhaps at her last gasp, and Snowflake abandoned to the custody of a lad, who was not too well disposed towards his employers ; Snowflake who was the last hope that he had of retrieving his broken fortunes.

When the thrice guilty husband of Valentine left the club, and took a cab to drive to the Madrid, as he passed the Avenue d'Eylau, a cold shiver passed through his frame, as though Death was near him.

CHAPTER XXXI

LOST !

HATRED is very clear-sighted, and Gontran had guessed rightly. The letter which George Cézambre had received did come from Auteuil, and told him that Diana had not yet returned home. The first thought which came to this young and faithful lover was that Diana had left him for another. Diana had proved her love to him, and for the three months that they had been together, had conducted herself as the best and truest of wives, yet now on the very first occasion he became suspicious of her. No one is perfect, and jealousy does not stay to reason. George found his carriage in charge of his faithful Domingo at the door of the club. The honest black had got down from the box, and was talking to Lisa on the pavement. It was a case of who should speak first, with both man and maid, but Domingo was not much of a talker,

and so Lisa gained the day. That morning the lovers had arranged that George should pass the day in Paris, as he had business with the upholsterer, who was furnishing some rooms which they had taken, and also to see his banker who had received money for him from his guardian ; and he had also accepted Saint Senier's invitation to dinner, so Diana had agreed not to expect him home until late, and had begged him not to hurry himself. Lisa told him after his departure that her mistress had dressed herself for riding, had had the bay horse saddled, and had gone out alone saying that she would return at five o'clock. At six, however, they began to be astonished at not seeing her, as she was always most punctual in her habits. At seven, Domingo had set out on a voyage of discovery, but could glean no intelligence, except that the custom-house officers at the barrier had seen a lady pass whose appearance corresponded with that of Mlle. de Ganges. Domingo had wandered about the numerous roads without success, and as the night was coming on had been compelled to return in a state of intense depression to the villa. He and Lisa had taken counsel together. What was to be done ? Domingo wanted to go at once to Paris and tell his master all, but in this Lisa did not concur. A woman, and especially a Parisian woman, can see rather more clearly than a negro newly-arrived from an island in the Indian Ocean. Lisa feared many things ; not that she believed that her mistress was deceiving her lover, but that it was very likely that she had some secrets even from George, and that as he would not be likely to return until midnight she might feel at liberty to make what use of the day she liked. She might have gone to dine somewhere, and would perhaps not be back until nine or ten o'clock, but that was a matter of small importance, as long as she should be back before George's return. She therefore persuaded Domingo not to warn his master, and sat herself down to supper with a good appetite. Domingo however was not so easily satisfied, and began to believe that some accident had happened. He now remembered that the bay horse which had not been out the day before, had shown a disposition to bolt ; he had stamped and champed his bit, whilst the negro was getting him ready, and when in the saddle Diana had some difficulty in holding him in. She was a good rider for a woman, but the horse required a man's hand to control him on certain occasions. Whilst Domingo's mind ran on his mistress having met with an accident, Lisa's imagination moved in a totally different direction. She thought a lover, after all, is not a husband, and that however much Diana might have loved George at the commencement, a change might have come over her now,

or that she might have gone out to amuse herself as George was enjoying himself at the club. But when eleven o'clock struck Domingo would no longer be restrained. He declared that his master would never forgive him for not having warned him before, and that he should at once take the train to Paris ; but Lisa persuaded him to harness the other horse and drive direct to the club, which would save much time, as it was some way from the Saint Lazare Station. She then wrote the letter which was to be given to the porter of the club, and getting into the carriage, Domingo drove off at a rapid rate.

George lost no time in returning home, where he had still a faint hope of finding Diana, as he saw a light in the bed-chamber ; but Lisa dispelled this allusion by telling him that she herself had left the lamp alight, as she did every evening, and he had not the heart to go up to the empty room. "Even the horse has not come back," muttered he. This was exactly what made Lisa believe that Mlle. de Ganges had not met with an accident. "Master," interposed Domingo, "that is not very surprising ; he has only been a short time in these stables and if an accident has happened far from here, he would not be likely to find his way back."

"You think then that an accident has occurred ?" asked George, sadly.

"I much fear so, Master. The horse was in a bad temper when I saddled him, and may have ran away. I warned Mademoiselle, but she would not listen to me."

"You say that she was seen entering the Bois by the Auteuil Gate ?"

"Yes, Master, and she took the road to Boulogne. The custom-house officer said so. One of them asserted that he saw her turn to the right, down the wide avenue that leads to the lakes."

"The Avenue Saint Cloud ? Yes, that was the ride that she preferred, she has often told me so ; well, I will go by that road, and I shall find her."

"What, master," exclaimed Domingo. "Will you ——"

"I will find her dead or alive."

"In such a vast space ?"

"I will search it from end to end."

"But the night is very dark."

"I will take a lantern, and we will search with it until it grows light."

Whilst this conversation was going on Domingo was unharnessing the horse, and Lisa was standing by listening to what was said. "And when it is light we will make enquiries ; there are park-keepers about,"

"If these people had seen the accident, they would have helped her, and brought her back here."

"Unless she was killed on the spot," said George, bitterly.

"Sometimes, Mademoiselle rode long distances, as far even as Bagatelle," hinted the maid, "and there are houses about there, not private houses, but restaurants, the Cascade, the Madrid, so that if anything had happened they might know about it in these places, for there are plenty of people about there in the racing season ; grooms, betting men, jockeys."

"That is true, and we needn't wait until to-morrow to ask for information."

"But now these places are closed, and the waiters asleep."

"We will wake them up. Look sharp, Domingo."

"And me, will you not take me with you ?" asked Lisa.

"No, Lisa, you will remain here."

"Perhaps that will be the best, in case Mademoiselle should come back."

"Come back ! Where could she have gone to, and what can she have been doing since she left here ?"

Lisa already regretted having said so much, for an imprudent word let slip might give George Cézambre's thoughts a totally different direction. "No," said he shaking his head. "She will not come back. You need not wait up for her—you had better go to bed."

"Oh, sir, it would not be worth while. I could not sleep a wink, I am too uneasy about my mistress. I shall lock myself up in my room, for I am afraid of being here alone ; and even then I shall be frightened, for ever since the woman was murdered here, I have always been nervous. You will find me up when you come back."

The recollection of the former tragedy which had taken place in the house added to George's feelings of depression.

"They said that this house would be unlucky," murmured he, "but she would take it. Heaven only knows if she will ever come back to it alive." Then after a long silence which Lisa did not dare to interrupt, he asked abruptly :

"Why were you so long in letting me know this ?"

The question was an embarrassing one, but Lisa got over it by saying that she did not wish to alarm her master, and that she was in momentary expectation of seeing Mlle. de Ganges come back. At that moment Domingo returned from the stable with the lantern, and Lisa re-entering the villa shut herself up to await her master's return.

"Go on in front," said George to Domingo, who obeyed him as a soldier obeys the orders of his superior, even though he may disapprove of the step that he is taking.

George followed behind, and they passed through the

Villa Montmorency where the gas is alight all night as in the streets of Auteuil. Having once passed through the gate of the Bois de Boulogne, they began to walk down the main road which led to Boulogne. After a certain hour all traffic ceases in this wide thoroughfare except in the boating and picnic seasons. The suburban omnibusses run up to midnight, but the last had passed some time before, and the drinking-shops at the side of the road had all their shutters securely closed. The master and man did not meet a single foot-passenger in their walk. At last they came to a spot where several paths diverged. One of these according to the sign-post led to the open space which separates the lakes. Without hesitation, and guided by the instincts of a lover, George turned down it. The night was not very dark, for the moon which was in her last quarter had risen, but the weather threatened to turn out rainy, and the sky was covered with thick black clouds, which the west wind drove hither and thither, every now and then completely hiding the stars. The boughs of the trees creaked and groaned as the wind swept through them; and the rustling of the leaves resembled the sad murmur of the waves when the land-breeze begins to blow. Domingo who had at first gone boldly to the front, now fell back and kept close to his young master, and showed signs of uneasiness. They were walking by the side of the road close to the ditch, and Domingo was holding the lantern so as to give as much light as possible. "Master," said he timidly, after having walked for twenty minutes in perfect silence. "if we continue to go on without knowing where we are going, we shall end by losing ourselves."

"We must arrive somewhere. Are you afraid?" asked George.

"No, master, and even if I was afraid, I wouldn't leave you—but we find nothing here—and it is not good to be out at night. The papers say that the Bois is full of bad characters."

"If they attack us we will defend ourselves. I have a revolver in my pocket."

This was quite true, for George always carried one about him, and to-night he had a large sum in notes and gold which might have been a tempting bait to nocturnal prowlers had they but foreseen that so rich a prey would pass within their reach. But no one had given them notice of this booty, and these gentlemen usually prefer to do their business in the neighbourhood of the fortifications.

"Oh, I would fight," answered the negro, boastfully, "and I have a good pair of fists too; but should we not do better to go and enquire for Mademoiselle, at the houses that Lisa spoke of?"

"They are not this side of the Bois," answered George, who had begun to know it very well from having often driven through it with Diana, "but there are some close to the Madrid, and if we continue in this direction we shall reach them." All the time that George had been walking his head had been filled with strange and varied ideas, and he frequently asked himself if the woman that he was searching for in the Bois was not after all in Paris, and whether her departure from the villa had not been a flight. Diana was self-willed, and hot-tempered, and that very morning they had had a slight difference regarding Mme. de Saint Senier ; a difference that had speedily been followed by a tender reconciliation. But for all that she might have cherished an angry feeling against him, and acted suddenly on impulse.

Nor was it impossible that she might have received an anonymous letter from Mme. de Saint Senier, who was quite capable of writing one, or from some enemy, for George had already some that he knew, and some doubtless that he did not. He struggled hard against these troublesome ideas, and ended at last by driving them away. Then uneasiness and dread again took hold of him, and he resolved to pursue his search though with but faint hopes of success. Domingo now kept silence ; he had made up his mind and walked on steadily with an eye that kept a vigilant watch, and an ear that listened to every sound. All at once he stopped short, and holding out the lantern to the full length of his arm, pointed out to George an object which was floating in the air, like a banner, fastened to the branch of a tree some feet from the ground. "Look there, master," whispered he.

"What—what is that ?" asked George.

"A veil, master, a veil like the one Mademoiselle wears when she puts on a man's hat to ride on horseback."

George leapt lightly over the ditch, and drew from its resting-place a blue gauze veil. "It is hers," cried he.

"So it is," answered Domingo, examining it by the light of his lantern. "I recognise it at once, for when she was mounting, Lisa was not there, and Mademoiselle asked me to tie a knot in it, as it was not firmly fastened to her hat. Probably I did not do it right and the wind has carried it away."

"No," muttered George Cézambre, "it has been violently torn away by that briar." For a long time after exchanging these words, master and man remained silent, each racking their brains to understand how the veil could have come to the place where they had found it. It was evident that Mlle. de Ganges had passed that way, and it would appear that she had been in the thicket ; but why should she have

done so, for it was full of undergrowth, and difficult to move about in, even on foot? There could be no reason for her coming into it at all. Was it likely either that people laying in ambush had torn her from her horse and dragged her into the thicket to rob, and perhaps murder her? George asked himself this question, but it seemed so strange and improbable that he did not retain the idea for a moment.

The Bois de Boulogne has not yet become a resort for cut-throats as the Forest of Bondy used to be, and abductions are certainly becoming rare, especially in the full light of the day; besides Mlle. de Ganges had left her house at three o'clock, and it was not likely that she would have been in the Saint Cloud Avenue at night-fall. Whilst the hapless lover lost himself in vague conjectures, Domingo, lantern in hand explored the spot, carefully examining the broken branches, and looking at the marks on the soft soil, which had not yet had time to dry after the recent rains. "Master," said he, "I think that I can guess what has happened. Mademoiselle was going along the road either at a walk or a canter, for she hated trotting, when the horse shied; he has more than once almost thrown me off by doing that when there was nothing to frighten him—a dog running across him, or a carter cracking his whip. Well, he has done that now, and jumped right into the thicket; the veil has been torn off by a branch, and the horse has fallen against that stump. You can see the marks of his hoofs in the mud: he fell on his side, and threw Mademoiselle over his head."

"You are right," murmured the affrighted George, "and she may have been killed on the spot."

"Oh! Master, you must not be sure of that—all falls are not fatal, and if an accident of that kind had happened we should have known it at the villa. Mademoiselle always carried a pocket-book in which were her cards with her name and address; in fact she said to me to-day as she put it into the bosom of her habit, 'If I break my neck, I shall not at any rate be taken to the mortuary, for I have written down my address in it.'"

"But in order to find this address, they would have to undress her, and certainly they have not done so here. How can we tell who has picked her up, or where she has been taken to?"

"Not far, master, I can take my oath of that. Paris is only a league from here, and there are plenty of houses close at hand."

"And what has become of the horse?"

"They must have taken it away with them—but I say again that Mademoiselle is not dead, and I can swear that my

presentiments never play me false. She may very likely be injured."

"Then she must be severely hurt. For if she had recovered her senses, she would have sent some one to me. She knew that I dined at the club."

"Perhaps she was afraid of alarming you—or very likely she could not find a messenger. If I were in your place, master, I would go back to the villa. Very likely some news may have come there since you left; even Mademoiselle herself, for all we know, may have returned."

It was evident that Domingo was tired of the searching expedition, and George grew angry. "Be off with you then," said George to the negro; "I can do without your aid. I shall search until I have found her. If necessary I will walk about here until daylight."

"So will I, master—do not send me away, please. I will go wherever you like."

"Well, then, come on," answered George, grasping the veil. "I am first going to the Restaurant de Madrid."

"Just as you like, master, only I don't know the way."

"But I do, so come along."

Domingo obeyed him in silence, and moving on in the same direction, they soon found themselves at the open space between the lakes. The rain was now falling at short intervals from the clouds as they hurried by, and this change in the weather diminished the chance of meeting anyone before they reached the Madrid. The park-keepers in such weather only come out at stated hours to make their rounds. Domingo was now perfectly resigned, and did not say a word to his master, who as silent as his servant walked along at a sharp pace. In due time they reached the Madrid, which is a large establishment used for various purposes. Gentlemen out riding stop there for their bitters, some people dine there, parties out for a day's pleasure occasionally have supper there, and in the summer people sometimes sleep there.

There are excellent stables for the horses that are going to run at Longchamps, with good galloping ground for exercise, and comfortable accommodation for the grooms and boys in attendance on them; with a snug coffee-room, in which the latter can wash out their mouths, as they talk over the trials that have taken place during the day. When George arrived the door was closed, but there were lights in some of the windows on the first floor, and through the closed shutters of the rooms below voices could be heard, although it was now very late; for the tramp through the wood had taken up a great deal of time. Domingo rang, and the waiter who after an interval opened the door started back

in astonishment on seeing a negro bearing a lantern, and escorting a well-dressed gentleman. But a few words from George explained matters, and the waiter at once said that at about five o'clock in the afternoon a boy had brought in a horse which he had found wandering about the Avenue Saint Cloud, and that, as no one had come to claim the animal they had put it in the stable until the owner should make his appearance. On George's request, he was at once taken to the stable, and at a glance recognised the bay horse, which was tied up, still saddled, and munching its hay in seeming content.

"You have not seen the lady who was riding it?"

"No, sir. The horse was loose when the boy caught it. He was going quietly then, but I think there must have been an accident, as his knees are barked, and the saddle is covered with mud."

This was the fact, and it was evident that Domingo was right as to the accident.

"How was it that you did not send anyone in search of the lady who had been riding it? She must have been injured in her fall."

"Faith, sir, the master thought of doing so. But it was impossible for him to know where the accident had happened, and the Bois de Boulogne is of great extent. We might have looked for a long time; and besides, this evening we were very busy for the house is full, and master said that he would send notice to the Commissary of Police to-morrow."

"Can I see your master?"

"He is in bed, and has given orders that he is not to be disturbed. Does the horse belong to you, sir?"

"Yes."

"Ah! I ask that, because there is a lady's saddle on it, and, as you can understand, we could not give it up without making inquiries."

"I don't want to take it away now, but——"

"If, sir, you would like to sleep here, we could give you an excellent bed, and to-morrow you could ask master what you liked. Did you walk here, sir?"

"Yes. I live at Autenil," answered George, who began to ask himself what he should do now, for though the bay horse had been found, Diana was as much lost as ever, and it was Diana that George was seeking.

He could now see exactly how things had happened. The horse, who had no limb broken, had got up after his fall, and had quietly taken the road to his stable. A boy had met him, and taken him to the Madrid, where most likely the lady was who had been riding him, and from whence he

might have broken away owing to the carelessness of the person to whom he had been entrusted. All that was exceedingly probable, but in the meantime what had become of Mlle. de Ganges? She might still be lying on the spot where she had fallen, stunned by the shock. Had she managed to gain her feet, only to fall again deeper in the recesses of the thicket? As this idea passed through his mind, George began to reproach himself for not having instituted a closer search, but then again he considered that had Diana recovered her senses she would have certainly endeavoured to gain the road, and not have plunged deeper into the coppice. It was useless then to re-commence a search which would doubtless end fruitlessly, and he was utterly overcome with fatigue. He therefore made up his mind to stay where he was.

"Can you put up my servant?" asked he.

"Certainly, sir. We have a small room, which will do well for him."

"Show me my room, then,"

"Will you take anything before you go to bed?"

"No, thank you."

"Because if you do, it will give me the time to get your room ready, which is not quite prepared. We have been very full to-day. The Count de Sartilly has been here to see his horse, which is to run to-morrow."

"The Count de Sartilly!" repeated George.

This name sounded like an evil omen to George, and he at once began to ask himself if the Count's visit to the Madrid had no other object than to look after the future winner of the Produce Stakes.

"Yes, sir, he and his partner, M. de Saint Senier, have been here, also Mme. de Saint Senier," said the waiter, proud to be able to quote the names of such aristocratic visitors.

"What time did M. de Sartilly come here?" asked George, quickly.

"About half-past three, and M. de Saint Senier came about twenty minutes afterwards. Do you know these gentlemen, sir?"

"Did they stay here long?" asked George, without paying any attention to the waiter's inquisitiveness.

"Only long enough to have a talk with the boy who has charge of Snowflake. A grand horse, sir. I have backed him for ten francs, and if I can get leave to-morrow I shall go to the course to see him come in first."

"Did M. de Sartilly come on horseback?"

"No; he came in a slap-up trap. M. and Mme. de Saint

Senier were in a very fine carriage. The Count left before they did."

"Do you know where he went to?"

"Let me see, sir. I think he went for a drive round the Bois. M. and Mme. de Saint Senier went straight back to Paris, and we have not seen them since; at least, not M. de Saint Senier," added the waiter with an air of mystery.

George paid no attention to the emphasis which the man put on this last sentence. All that he had noticed was that Gontran de Sartilly had been driving in the Bois at the same time that Mlle. de Ganges had been riding there. He did not for an instant believe that she had gone off with him, but the coincidence was enough to disquiet Diana's suspicious lover. It was all very well for him to repeat to himself that Sartilly had come to his club after dinner, that he had played heavily, and that for all he knew he might be there still; but he could not bridle his imagination, which seemed to show him that Gontran had something to do with Diana's strange disappearance.

He made up his mind to send Lisa, who had kept up her acquaintance with Francis, to M. de Sartilly's house, the next day but he must wait a little before he did so, and might as well take some rest whilst he was doing so. He therefore followed the waiter, who led him from the stable to the main building, where on the first floor were the rooms used for the restaurant, and two other rooms, one of which was a gentlemen's coffee-room, and the other a bar used by the servants. Just then the coffee-room was empty, but the gas was still burning, and the waiter left George there, whilst he went to give orders regarding the bedroom. Domingo, who had kept close to his master, now asked leave to go to the bar to drink a glass of rum, and George the more willingly granted his request from the fact that he wished to be alone to think out a new idea to which his brain had given birth, and that was whether Diana after her fall had not sought shelter at the Madrid, and Gontran de Sartilly had not come there to meet her. In order to reach the bar it was necessary to cross the court, and Domingo, in doing so, suddenly found himself face to face with a man. The recognition was mutual. He was Mme. de Saint Senier's coachman.

Both men were much surprised. Then explanations were entered into. Domingo, who did not care to tell the whole truth to a man whom he did not trust, simply said that his master had come to the Madrid to reclaim one of his horses which had escaped from the stable, and which had been traced to Borne's. Of this tale the coachman believed as much as he chose, but he did not hesitate to tell the negro

that his mistress, after a performance at the Circus in the Champs Elysées, which she never failed to visit every Saturday, had suddenly determined to sup at the Madrid with her friend, the Baroness de Réchampy ; that the meal had been prolonged, that the ladies were now about to leave, and that he had received orders to get the carriage ready. Domingo made up his mind to warn his master that Mme. de Saint Senier was in the hotel ; and on his side the coachman thought that his mistress would not be ill-pleased to learn that a chance had brought M. Cézambre to the restaurant, for the handsome coachman was no longer jealous ; his mistress had found means to soothe him, and he did all he could to be agreeable to her. Ever since February she had not ceased to repeat to him that the young creole had endeavoured to compromise her reputation, and that she would be only too glad to play him a trick in return. Now or never was the time to do so, if, as the suspicious coachman believed, George Cézambre intended to pass the night at the hotel in the strictest incognito.

Domingo entered the bar, where two or three of the stable-boys were seated with a bottle of whisky before them. Two of the horses that were to run against Snowflake were stabled at the Madrid, and Dick was amongst the drinkers, or rather the talkers, for Dick was excessively temperate. The negro, who had been born and brought up in the Mauritius, spoke English as well as he did French, and he could have easily joined in the conversation whilst he was sipping the drink with which a sharp-looking barmaid had supplied him ; but from motives of prudence, as well as curiosity, he contented himself with playing the part of a listener only. He listened to these *horsey* young fellows discussing the merits and criticising the defects, of their masters. All, however, were agreed on one point, and that was that French gentlemen were absolutely ignorant of sporting matters, and they decided that Saint Senier was a mug, Sartilly a humbug, and Mowbridge the jockey whose name had somehow cropped up in the conversation, a thoroughly bad lot capable of coming to an understanding with a bookmaker to sell a race if it suited him. Dick declared that before joining his comrades he had taken care to lock the door of the stable in which Snowflake was ; and that he should sleep by the side of the noble animal, so that no one could come near him until the moment that he went to the post. Domingo listened eagerly to this conversation, and made up his mind to report it to his master, and therefore he was in no hurry to leave the room.

During this time George walked up and down waiting impatiently for his room. After ten minutes, which seemed

to him an age, the waiter made his appearance and said that a lady wished to see him.

"What lady?" asked George, in extreme surprise.

"A lady who would not give her name, sir, but who said that you knew her; she is in a private sitting-room upstairs; perhaps you will have the goodness to come with me."

"A private sitting-room?"

"Yes, sir, we have some very charming ones."

"I daresay you have, but I don't want to see them. How could the lady, who sent you to me and who pretends to know me, have found out that I am here? I have not given my name, and she has not seen me."

"Excuse me, sir, but the windows of the sitting-room look on the courtyard, and no doubt she saw you when you were crossing it with your black servant. He carried a lantern, and so it was easy to recognise him; besides his colour is rather remarkable."

George again asked himself if this mysterious lady was not Diana de Ganges, who had hidden herself at the Madrid where she had had an appointment with the Count de Sartilly. But if it was she why should she summon her lover after having left him. Did she desire to have a final explanation with him on neutral ground, so as to break off with him without any risk of personal violence; for at the villa, perhaps, he might have treated her as the Russian had treated his mistress.

Anything, however, was better than a state of uncertainty, so he said: "Very well, take me to the lady." Then, after a moment's reflection, he added: "My servant is in the bar, tell him not to go to bed until he has seen me again." For he thought that he might very likely have need of the services of the faithful Domingo after the interview which he had decided to risk with the unknown.

"I will not fail to do so, sir. Your bedroom is ready, and I will send your servant there."

George, who was anxious to be rid of his uncertainty, followed the waiter who led him up to the first floor, and his heart beat violently as the waiter threw open the door and closed it hastily behind him as soon as he had entered. A thick cloud of smoke almost concealed the occupants, though there were about a dozen candles alight.

"Many thanks for having come, my dear sir," said a voice, which was not that of Diana de Ganges.

CHAPTER XXXII

"MY LORD, 'TIS JEALOUSY"

WITH much blinking of the eyes, George managed to discover through the acrid clouds of tobacco smoke two women reclining on a couch, and smoking Russian cigarettes of unusual size.

"Come in," continued the voice. "One would almost swear that you were afraid of us. Come in, and let me introduce you to my friend, the Baroness Réchampy."

All George's hopes vanished as he recognised Mme. de Saint Senier, but instead of accepting her invitation he drew back. "Ah, well!" said she with a sneer, "I know that it is not I that you are in search of. You are in trouble about the beautiful Diana. Be comforted, she is not lost, and I will give you news of her."

George ought to have withdrawn at once from these women, sprawling about on the couch of a restaurant, who sent a sensation of horror through his whole body. They were half-intoxicated, having finished a bottle of chartreuse between them, and were finishing their debauch with tobacco. For nothing could issue from the lips of these shameless creatures but a string of calumny and falsehood: and yet he lingered, a prey to that sickly curiosity which is the offspring of jealousy. "You are burning to know what has become of her," continued the lady. "Well, I can tell you. But if you wish me to do so, begin by sitting down. Oh, no, not on the couch—I will spare your native innocence. Take that chair, and then the table will be between us."

George did as he was bid, resolving to endure everything for the sake of obtaining the information which Mme. de Saint Senier had promised him.

She had already "pulled herself together," and her companion, the little Baroness de Réchampy, had regained her equilibrium.

Both of them affected an air of steadiness, as a drunken soldier does when the captain inspects his company.

The baroness, who had every desire to fascinate this handsome young creole who had caught her fancy at the

horse show, threw herself into a becoming attitude; but Mme. de Saint Senier, who despaired of ever again renewing the idyll commenced on a certain night in February, only thought of avenging her defeat by attacking her rival with her venomous tongue. "My dear child," said she, with an assumption of the maternal which did not sit at all gracefully on her, "permit me to give you a piece of advice which I am justified in doing, as I am a few years older than you, and we also come from the same part. Don't be afraid, I am not going to talk of what has passed. You had a letter of introduction to my husband, and I received you warmly. You were mistaken as to my intentions and we have not seen you since. But that is over and forgotten, and all I desire is your good company. Let me then point out to you the discomforts that will arise from the connection which you have formed with all the careless impetuosity of youth."

Mme. de Réchampy had never heard her friend adopt the high moral tone before, and she could hardly restrain her laughter. George, however, began to lose patience. "Madame," said he, abruptly: "If it is your intention to give me a lecture ——"

"I!" exclaimed the Viscountess, reverting at once to her outspoken manner, "why, I am for liberty in love, as in everything else. My husband shares my ideas, and does not hide them, as you ought to know who are so intimate with him. He goes his way, and I mine. For instance, it was his wish to pass his evening, his night for all I know, at his club; he was right to do as he liked, and I should make no enquiries as to the time when he returned home. I and this lady went to the Circus, and afterwards as neither she or I had any desire for bed, we told our coachman to drive us to the Madrid as we were getting hungry. I have been here before to-day with my husband to look at one of his horses which is to run to-morrow; my friend and I supped merrily like a couple of bachelors, and then we set to smoking Russian cigarettes, which have made us half screwed."

"So I see, Madame," answered George, more in suspense than ever, "but——"

"You think that I am going away from the subject in which you are interested. I am coming back to it, but I only want to show you that I am the last woman in the world to blame you for having followed your whim. Mademoiselle de Ganges took your fancy, and you took her away, or rather she took you. I don't intend to tell you what I think of the whole business, but only say—'*Mind yourself.*'"

"I—I don't follow you."

"Yes, you do perfectly. But there are things of which you are ignorant, and which I am going to tell you, in your interest, of course. You think that this companion of the unfortunate Countess de Sartilly conceived a violent passion for you, and sacrificed her name and reputation to you? In a word that you were her first love?"

"Madame!"

"Don't get in a rage, but listen to me. You are but a child, and know nothing of life. Certainly you are handsome enough for this red-headed woman to worship, and it was worth her while to throw up the paltry employment she held, to follow you, for you were rich, and the advantage was all on her side. But how was it you did not guess that she had been for a long time the mistress of Count —"

"It is false."

"What a charming thing it is to be young, and how you wince when one tears away one of your illusions. Do you not see that if Sartilly had not been her lover he would never have tolerated her presence in his house where she was the source of constant quarrels. No doubt both women were unhappy, for Valentine is a weak fool, but Diana is full of rebellious instincts; whilst Gontran is the incarnation of selfish egotism, and wishes every one to yield to him. Diana had had quite enough of his tyranny, and the unhappy position to which her want of fortune had reduced her. You appeared to deliver her just at the right moment, and she was artful enough to persuade you that she had sacrificed herself to you so as to get a share of your money. For she is very artful."

"Oh, yes! Very artful, and very naughty," put in the little Baroness, though she had no reason to complain of Diana, but then Society women who have slipped over the boundary will always back each other up.

George, poor unfortunate boy, let his head sink on his breast, and could find no words to refute the treacherous accusations of Mme. de Saint Senier. His suspicions began to take tangible form, and he feared lest there should be some truth in the accusations against Diana, who was not present to defend herself. "And now," continued the Viscountess, "shall I tell you why she has left you?"

"How do you know that she has left me?" asked George, eagerly.

"No one has told me, but I had not much difficulty in guessing it. When I was here earlier in the day with my husband we met Sartilly, and I remarked, 'really I don't know why that Mademoiselle de Ganges is in the habit of riding every day in the Bois de Boulogne, and I have frequently met

her there.' Sartilly at once left us rather abruptly, and ordered his coachman to drive to the part of the Bois that I had mentioned without meaning any harm. My coachman saw the Count's victoria turn down the Avenue of the Reine Marguerite, and he must have met your fair friend not very far from this. Of course I was not present at the interview, but I can guess what passed. Sartilly has never renounced the idea of taking Diana from you. He went up to her and pleaded his cause, as he knows so well how to do when he wants to cajole a woman. He placed his all at her disposal. He pointed out to her that since Valentine's departure he is free, and offered to live openly with her. There was to be an end to all painful humiliations, and make-shifts. She is a proud woman, and the position of the Count's acknowledged mistress tempted her—and—she followed Gontran to his house, where I hope that you will not be foolish enough to go and look for her."

"If I went, it would be to kill them both," replied George in a low deep voice, "but she is not there. Some accident has happened to her; the bay horse she was riding has been down, he was caught straying about the roads, and brought here. I have just seen him."

"But you haven't seen your fair friend. She would naturally not wish to make her entrance into Gontran's house on horseback, and she therefore just let the animal go, and got into his victoria. Sartilly is rich enough to buy her another horse."

At this George grew pale with rage; he no longer hesitated to believe that Diana had betrayed him, and he swore to be revenged. Mme. de Saint Senier, profiting by the advantage she had gained, only thought how she might poison the wound that she had inflicted on that loving heart. "Of course the girl's conduct is inexcusable," said she, with an accent of disgust. "I am not astonished at her leaving you, for this sort of connection does not last long; but she ought to have done so in a proper manner. I have seen many such partings in good society, but without any discreditable abruptness."

The little baroness was going to add something to what her friend had said, when there was a knock at the door. George started to his feet. Mme. de Saint Senier cried, "Come in," and her coachman appeared, hat in hand.

"Your ladyship's carriage is waiting," said he, glancing out of the corner of his eye at the man at whom he had shot two months before.

George also recognised the rascal who had fired at him as if he were a mad dog, and was, for an instant, tempted to seize him by the throat, and pay off the grudge he owed to

him and to his mistress, at the same moment. He contented himself with casting a contemptuous glance at both of them, and had Mme. de Saint Senier possessed any feelings of shame, she would have sunk into the earth before his disdainful look. But she was not the woman to be put out of countenance by such a thing as that. "Very good," said she in an unconcerned manner; "then we will go down. Tell the people here to send me the bill for the supper to-morrow." The coachman bowed and disappeared, and the shameless woman, turning to George, continued: "Will you forgive me for having caused you a little pain by rendering you so great a service? No, I can see that you will not, and I am much grieved. But I will console myself with the thought that, later on, you will be grateful to me for having exposed to you the treachery of a creature utterly unworthy of you. When you meet my husband, will you tell him that——"

But George did not wait for the end of a speech which did not promise to be of a pleasant character, and hastily left the room; he descended the staircase, crossed the court, calling Domingo as he did so, but the latter no doubt could not hear him, for he made no answer.

George had changed his mind; he was now for going to Sartilly's house. He did not stop to consider how he should get into it at this hour of the night, and he could not even know if the Count had returned home, for he had left him at the club after receiving a large sum from him. George had no thought of punishing Diana except by disdain and contempt, but he determined to have Gontran's life; he would strike him the first time they met, force him to fight, and kill him in one of those desperate hand-to-hand encounters, which almost always end in the death of one or other of the combatants. As he was going towards the bar, he saw the two ladies cross the court, preceded by a waiter carrying a light. In his efforts to avoid them, he slipped into a dark corner and remained perfectly still, thinking that they would pass by him in order to reach their carriage. The ladies, who did not see him, were conversing in rather loud tones, and he heard the little Baroness say: "It is a nuisance to go away so early; are you sleepy?"

"Not a bit," replied Mme. de Saint Senier. "If it was the season for the opera balls, I would willingly go there and finish the night. But what can we do here at this hour? If my little creole had been more manageable we might have prolonged our sitting, but he does not understand chaff, and is mad after that red-haired woman with green eyes. There is no good to be done with him, my dear. He thinks of no one but her."

"He will turn out badly."

"So I told him ; I think I said enough."

"Too much; he is quite capable of shooting her when he sees her, and blowing his own brains out afterwards. All that sort of girls have luck. No man has ever thought of killing himself for me."

"Nor for me either, and I shouldn't care about anyone doing so. Such tragedies frighten me ; I have laid myself out for amusement without scandal."

"You are quite right there, my dear ; but I still persist in saying that we are going home too early. I should have liked to have seen that horse—what was its name ? oh—Snowflake, which is to win so much money for your husband to-morrow."

"Yes, I shan't see much of that," murmured Mme. de Saint Senier. "But, if you want to look at the beast, I can show him to you." Then calling to the waiter, who had discreetly moved a little way off : "Take me," said she, "to the stable where the racers are, and open the loose box in which mine is."

"I would willingly do so, Madame, but the English boy who looks after him has taken away the key."

"Where has he gone to ? I thought he was going to sleep by the side of the horse—he told my husband and myself so."

"And so he intends, Madame ; but just now he is in the bar with some other boys."

"What do you say ? It seems odd to me that he should be drinking with those who are in the employ of our antagonists. Fetch the young rascal here."

"Here he comes, Madame."

Dick had just come out of the bar, and found himself face to face with Mme. de Saint Senier. He showed no recognition, however, and was passing her without notice, without even touching his cap, when she stopped him. "Why were you not at your post ?" she asked.

The lad shrugged his shoulders, but made no reply, and was continuing on his way when she shrieked out, "What do you mean ! Don't you know that I am your master's wife ? You must, for I was here with him this morning."

Dick made a sign that he was acquainted with the fact, but he did not open his mouth.

"Speak English if you like. I understand it." Then, as Dick persisted in remaining silent, she continued : "You are doing this expressly ; you are most insolent, and I will have you turned out for it."

Dick did not flinch. The little Baroness laughed loudly, and George, hidden in his corner, saw all that was passing by the light the waiter carried.

In a furious passion Mme. de Saint Senier pushed the arm of the obstinate lad, and cried out, "You shall be settled with to-morrow; but now I order you to take me to the box where my horse is."

This order unloosed Dick's tongue, who answered in plain enough French, but with a strong English accent, "I don't take my orders from you. The horse isn't yours; it belongs to your husband and M. de Sartilly. You shan't see him. I promised that no one should go into the stable, and no one shall."

Mme. de Saint Senier was going to fly out again, when Mme. de Réchampy calmed her by whispering: "Come away, my dear, I shall be quite satisfied with seeing Snowflake to-morrow, and you cannot in common decency quarrel with a stable lad." Dick, after enunciating his peremptory refusal, had continued on his way, and the Viscountess permitted herself to be drawn away to her carriage by her friend. Whilst they were getting in, Domingo came out of the bar and perceived George. "Ah, master," said the negro, "I have learned more strange things about M. de Sartilly; there were a lot of grooms in there chattering in English, and as they thought I did not understand them, they did not care what they said."

"What were they saying?" asked George, who had hardly recovered from the varied emotions through which he had passed.

"Well, they said that the Count was ruined, and that to recoup himself he was going to commit some robbery on the turf, and that he had made arrangements with his jockey to lose the race."

"And it is for such a villain as that, that she has betrayed me," cried George, who did not hesitate to speak out before his faithful follower.

"What! has Mademoiselle——"

"She met the Count de Sartilly in the Bois de Boulogne, and they have gone off together."

"Impossible! master."

"You will see that it is true, for you shall go with me to his house in the Avenue d'Eylau."

"What, master, you want to——"

"I want to insult him, and when I have him at sword's point, I will kill him."

Domingo saw that his young master had lost his head, and to prevent him from committing a folly, he had the presence of mind to say,

"You need not take the trouble to go there, for he will be here to-morrow morning."

"How do you know that?"

"One of the stable boys said so. You had better wait here, and then you will be sure of seeing him; whilst at his house they wouldn't let you in."

"You are right. I will wait for him here, and compel him to fight on the spot. There are plenty of places close by, and I shall kill him."

At twenty years of age one believes in everything.

CHAPTER XXXIII

VAGUE SUSPICIONS

WITH the dawn of day, Gontran left his club, without a shilling in the world, with his brain on fire, and his heart full of rage and despair. Those who have lived in the gambling world know what the mornings are like after a night passed at the gaming table. They remember the pale light of the day forcing its way through the curtains, the expiring candles, the smell of stale cigar smoke, the yawning waiters, and then after leaving the club, the sight of the coachmen asleep on their boxes, the hideous night cabs, musty and unhealthy-looking, the pavement invaded by the street sweepers, and the picture of working Paris commencing its daily labour. The mechanic going to his workshop, the apprentice with his loaf under his arm, and the old woman who dispenses cups of so-called coffee at her stall. At that hour all fallacious hopes take to flight, the battle of life commences, and the unhappy wretch who has left his last coin on the green cloth of the card-table asks himself whether it would not be better to end it all in the Seine than to seek a sleepless bed, or worse even than that, to be haunted by the visions which are the offspring of despair.

The Count de Sartilly had not gone quite so far as this, but he had moved one step nearer to the abyss, the destination of all those who fall from their high estate. He did not yet consider that he was beaten in the race of life, and he trusted more than ever to his own energy to extricate himself from the position in which he had placed himself by squandering the money he so urgently required. In a few hours Snowflake would doubtless win the Produce Stakes; but what

irritated Sartilly more than anything was that in his game he had acted like a mere tyro, in having allowed his passion to get the better of him, instead of having remained cold, calm, and calculating. His self-love had driven him into the game which had ended so disastrously for him. He had thought to crush George by mere weight of money. George, whom he loathed and hated, and who had continued to win from him until the moment when he had been called away by a letter, and then had gone off carrying away his enemy's money with him. And, worst fault of all, instead of having profited by the warning that Fortune had given him, Sartilly had striven to regain his money, and had committed the greatest fault which an experienced gambler can be guilty of, that of endeavouring to make head against a run of ill-luck.

Punishment had not been slow to overtake him, and M. Vacheron's son-in-law left the club without one of those banknotes which he had extorted from the pockets of the good old man.

"I am rightly served," muttered he between his teeth, "to have been cleaned out by a greenhorn, and a set of timid punters who had not the pluck to go *banco* once. They eat me up by degrees. It is a double kind of death to be killed by players of that class. Better to die at one blow. It was lucky that I met Oxwall yesterday, or his money would have gone with the rest." Of all the sins with which his conscience was charged Count de Sartilly only repented of the most pardonable, that of having gambled away money which he had promised on his honour to use in paying his debts before leaving France. He would willingly have applied to himself the words of Talleyrand regarding the death of the last of the race of Condé, shot in the ditch of Vincennes, by order of Napoleon I. : "It is worse than a crime, it is a blunder."

And now he must repair this mistake, and at the same time take his revenge. M. Cézambre, his opponent at the gaming table, had lost his mistress, and he, Gontran, would take good care not to yield her to him again. Snowflake was under the guardianship of a faithful boy who would preserve him from any machinations on the part of Oxwall, who besides had tacitly signed a treaty of peace by receiving the eighty thousand francs that were owing to him. Valentine's husband got into one of those belated cabs that were standing about, and jingled off to his house in the Avenue d'Eylau.

Almost all his household were up and about. The porter had kept one eye open, his wife was sitting by the bedside

of the patient, and the valet was keeping guard in the hall.

Everyone was eagerly expecting the master, who ought to have been home much earlier, and each was anxious to give him the news regarding Mlle. de Ganges. She had not recovered consciousness, and had been delirious during the night, and Dr. Pontier, who had visited her again at midnight, was even now by her side. Francis, although strictly cross-examined, persisted in declaring that no one had been to the house since the Count's departure, and received orders to inform the doctor that M. de Sartilly had returned, and would see him in three-quarters of an hour. After having given this message Gontran went to his own room to change his dress, after which he proposed to go to the Madrid, first, of course, having interviewed the doctor; and to pass the morning in company with his groom and Mowbridge, the latter having been summoned by him for eleven o'clock, to breakfast there and to be at Longchamps in time for the first race. Diana was not yet in a state to listen to him, and he thought that she would do so the more willingly when she knew that his horse had won, which would at once lift him out of the mire. He would then be freed from all the uneasiness which was surrounding him on all sides, and he could urge her to come with him to England, and point out to her that it would be better to leave a lover without any social position, to become the avowed mistress of a nobleman of rank and means.

If the unfortunate girl should die from the effects of her fall, this plan would drop to the ground; but no one could venture to reproach him for having picked up Mlle. de Ganges after her accident, and brought her to his own house to have her injuries looked to. In this event, Gontran would lose Diana; but George would do the same, who would be less likely to console himself for his loss than his rival would. As soon as he had completed his toilet, the Count came downstairs, and whilst he was waiting for the doctor, smoked a cigar in the garden to collect his thoughts.

He possessed in the highest degree the gift of being able to get away from his troubles—that is to say, to momentarily forget the past, even events of a most recent date, and to look in the face present difficulties; he hardly thought at all about the money that he had so foolishly lost, and his mind only ran on the heavy bets that he was going to make, and the Produce Stakes that he was going to win. The doctor shortly made his appearance looking a little exhausted with his long vigil. "My dear doctor," said Sartilly, "I respected the orders you gave, and did not go near the poor girl —"

"You might have done so," said the doctor, "for she would not have recognised you."

"Then her state has not changed?"

"If anything, she is worse. To the torpor brought about by the effects of the fall has succeeded a state of nervous excitement. She is much agitated, and talks a great deal of nonsense. I dread brain fever."

"And that would doubtless kill her?"

"Not necessarily; and I am endeavouring to check it by applications of ice to the top of the head. But even if it should set in I do not despair, but shall do my best to the end. I am much helped by the nurse that I sent in, and by your porter's wife; but what the patient mostly requires is calm and rest; the least excitement will kill her."

"She shall be quite quiet. Do you think that she knows the position she is in?"

"I should say no; though it is very hard to pronounce in a case like hers. She may perhaps have some confused notion but not perfect lucidity, which can only come back slowly. What is certain is, that she has not lost all remembrance of the past, for she often speaks of Madame de Sartilly. She speaks of her by her Christian name."

"Valentine? Yes, that is natural enough; she and my wife were schoolfellows."

"She has also very frequently mentioned the name of a man—George."

"Hush, my dear doctor!" murmured the Count, placing his finger on his lips. "I know that you are the most discreet of men, but there are matters which we had better not speak of. You are not ignorant that ——"

"I do not know anything, nor do I want to; and if I remark that Mlle. de Ganges has mentioned a man's name, it is to urge you to prevent him from coming near her. An interview would most likely produce a fatal result."

"I will take good care that your orders are carried out," answered Gontran, who was a little surprised at this direction, which accorded so well with his own wishes. "I speak as a doctor only," added M. Pontier, "and I occupy myself with Mlle. de Ganges' bodily health, and take no heed of other matters."

"Very good, doctor; and I thank you much," returned the Count, with a smile.

"I am only doing my duty, and will remove my veto when there shall be no further occasion for it; but until then no one must enter her room—no, not even a certain Lisa, whom she is constantly speaking of; her maid, I fancy."

"Lisa!" returned Sartilly, more and more surprised at

hearing the doctor successively name the persons whose intervention he dreaded most ; "Oh, be at ease, she shall not set foot in my house. I have long since given orders here about her. She used to be my wife's maid, but I had to send the jade off, for she flirted with all the men-servants."

"Then I did well to tell you of her," said M. Pontier, "and if she still has any connections with those in your house it would be well to take precautions."

"Be at ease ; I will do all that is needful. When shall I see you again ?"

"I will return some time in the day. Now I confess that I am going off to have a sleep."

"Right, doctor ; and I ought to do the same, for I have not been to bed ; but, unluckily for me, I did not spend my time in watching by the bedside of a sick person."

"Yes, you look a little fatigued, Count ; are you in pain ?"

"Not at all, but I lost a great deal of money at cards, and I am going to try and get it back at the races, so I fear that I may not see you again to-day, though I shall be home early."

"You will find me by the patient's side, and I hope that I shall have good news to give you of her condition. If she can sleep she is saved."

Sartilly escorted the doctor to the gate, and then took a turn round the garden, and as he passed under Diana's windows, which the doctor had ordered to be left open, he fancied he heard her voice calling upon George.

Gontran was still wandering about the grounds deep in his reflections, when he perceived a woman with her face against the bars of the fence looking fixedly at the house. He recognised her in a moment—it was Lisa.

"What are you doing there, you Jezebel ?" cried Sartilly, roughly.

"I am not a Jezebel, and the street is free to everyone," answered the girl.

"Don't hang about here then, for if you continue to do so I will set the footmen on to you, who will treat you in such a manner that you will not want to come here any more."

"I should like to see you do it ; I am not afraid of your footmen."

Sartilly never intended to put his threat into execution ; and on reflection he thought it might be better, instead of losing his temper, to endeavour to make the girl talk ; for he felt sure that she was in search of Mlle. de Ganges, who had disappeared from her own home the day before. He was

not surprised that the wily girl had guessed that Diana was at his house, but he was positive that she did not know how she had come there, and this gave him a splendid idea. He had eagerly sought for an opportunity to wring George Cézambre's heart, and now he had found one. "Ah," said he, with a smile, "you have lots of pluck, and I shall waste my time in trying to frighten you. Speak out boldly, and say that you have come to look for your mistress, and that you think she is here."

"Yes," answered Lisa, promptly, "and now I am sure of it."

"Hulloa, and on what do you found your opinion, Miss, eh?"

"If she had not been here you would not have asked me if I had come after her. Do you dare to deny it?"

"Powerfully argued; and now may I venture to ask you what you will do if it has pleased Mlle. de Ganges to come to my house?"

"I should ask if she had come of her own free will."

"Do you think that I have carried her off forcibly?"

"You are capable of doing so."

"You flatter me. But suppose Mlle. de Ganges had thought fit to leave Auteuil, where she was getting bored to death, and to take up her abode here, which is certainly a more cheerful locality, what would you do then?"

"I should ask to see her."

"On my word, you are an unbeliever."

"Not more so than Saint Thomas."

"And suppose that Mlle. de Ganges won't show herself to convince you?"

"Do not let us wrangle: only tell me if she is here, and where you met her."

"So that you may go and report the whole to M. Cézambre."

"Just so."

"Then he has sent you here?"

"No; he is not even aware that I have come, and just now I do not know where he is."

"I don't believe that; but come, I will be more open than you. Yes, Mlle. de Ganges is here. I had the happiness to meet her yesterday in the Bois de Boulogne. We had a talk, and she told me all her troubles. I told her mine, and we came to an understanding at once."

"Impossible," sighed Lisa, clasping her hands as though she had heard some monstrous tale of crime.

"It is curious, is it not?" sneered Sartilly. "You fancied that the lady of the villa did not like me."

"She hated you, she has told me so a hundred times."

"And you believed her. Why, haven't you knocked about long enough to know that women always say the contrary to what they think. The fact is that Mlle. de Ganges took a fancy to a young fool, and that after a time she discovered that this pretty little Adonis from torrid climes did not suit her at all. For a month past she has been weary of him, and was only awaiting an opportunity to get rid of him. That opportunity came yesterday, and she has left M. Cézambre, and will never return to him. Tell this to the little man from her, and from me."

"I will not fail to do so when Mlle. de Ganges entrusts me with the commission," answered the waiting-maid.

"You expect that she will see you?" asked Sartilly, ironically.

"I am sure she will ; tell her I am here, and you will see."

"She is asleep."

"I will wait until she wakes."

"You will wait a long time, then, for my servants have orders not to let you come in."

"But Mlle. de Ganges will come out, I suppose ?"

"I don't think so."

"Then she is ill ?"

"She was never better."

"Indeed ! Why was Dr. Pontier here just now ? He does not come here for nothing, I suppose."

"Come, this is too much," exclaimed Sartilly, enraged at her obstinacy. "So you are spying on all that is taking place in my house, are you ? Do you think that I will suffer this ? Be off at once, or——"

"Or what ? Are you going to call a policeman to prevent my looking into your garden ? Do so, Count, do so. Then I will tell my little story to him, and when he knows that I am looking for my mistress, who has been smuggled away in a mysterious manner, I don't think he will say that I am in the wrong. Or suppose I go to the Rue de Dôme to Dr. Pontier, he knows me well enough, for he attended me once ; he certainly will not refuse to tell me all about Mademoiselle."

"Go to the devil, you jade," exclaimed Sartilly, who had come to the end of his patience. "It is too good of me to talk to you. If you find M. Cézambre wants any explanation, let him come to me and I will cure him of meddling in my affairs," and with these words Gontran cut short the conversation by turning away. Neither had Lisa any wish to carry it on any further, for now she knew for certain that Mlle. de Ganges was in the house of the Count de Sartilly.

The presentiment that had driven her to seek her here had not deceived her, and she felt convinced that her mistress was detained in spite of herself. She half suspected the truth from having noticed the visit of Dr. Pontier, and she determined not to return to the villa without having obtained reliable information of what had happened to her mistress. She trusted to her old lover Francis for this, and did not at all care for the abuse of the Count de Sartilly. She therefore made up her mind to go away until the master should have left the premises, and as he would be all day at the races, the field would be open to her ; and then she would try to get hold of the valet, who might, despite the strict orders of his master, introduce her into the house itself. At that instant she caught sight of Francis, who had come out to announce to his master that the carriage was ready ; she could see that he, too, had caught sight of her, but she took care to make no sign to him which the Count would certainly have remarked, and she therefore affected to leave the vicinity of the house. Sartilly was glad to see her go away, and after repeating his orders that no one should be admitted to the house, he drove off to the Madrid, where he ought to have been before.

"It is only one's own people that betray us," says a proverb ; and Gontran, though no doubt he knew it, did not for a moment suspect that Francis, his confidential man, could refuse nothing to the waiting-maid who had gone over to the enemy ; besides, he was just now thinking a great deal less of Mlle. de Ganges than of his horse. When he arrived at the Madrid it was only eight o'clock in the morning, and no one was up.

Mme. de Saint Senier's supper had kept two or three of the waiters up very late ; the barmaid had not gone to bed until three o'clock, the master of the house was taking a long rest to prepare him for the fatigues of the day. Domingo, worn out by his exertions, was snoring steadily, and George, from whom sleep had for some time fled, had at last sunk to slumber in his room on the first floor. On the other hand, however, the stable lads had been up with the dawn, for horses will not wait patiently for the services of their valets. When the Count got out at the hotel, it was a sleepy groom who opened the door and helped the coachman to unharness his horse ; whilst Gontran, who knew the place thoroughly, passed through the courtyard, and went to the stables reserved for the horses that are to run at Longchamps. Sartilly found Dick walking Snowflake round the paddock which lies at the back of the stables. The horse looked in **excellent form and condition**, and his appearance gladdened

the eyes of his owner. Snowflake came of an illustrious lineage ; his sire Floreal, had won the Derby, and his dam Bastille, the Oaks, and he looked as if he was going to rival the feats of his progenitors.

Dick appeared to be as sulky as ever, and did not seem delighted at the sight of his master ; he barely touched his cap to him, and instead of stopping short, ready to answer questions, he continued to walk Snowflake round the paddock, leaving Sartilly to follow if he pleased. Gontran had no desire to make the lad vexed with him, so he took no notice of this behaviour, but walked along by his side. To the praises which Sartilly lavished on him for his care of his charge, he only answered in monosyllables, so that Sartilly at last said, " Come, let us see what is the matter. Yesterday I threatened to send you off, but I shall not do so now. You have looked after the horse admirably, and so I can overlook your bad temper. If you have anything to complain of, out with it ; here I am ready to listen, and do what I can for you. Are not your wages sufficient ? "

" It is not that," growled Dick.

" Then what are you so ill-tempered about ! "

" Mowbridge."

" Again ! What has Mowbridge done to you ? You told me what you thought of him, and I agreed that he had many faults, but what do they signify as long as he wins the race ? "

" He was bragging yesterday that he would lose it."

" Bragging ! where ? "

" In a tavern before one of my pals, who told me of it."

" He must have been laughing at them. If he had had any idea of doing it he would not have talked of it."

" He was drunk, and so he was when he came here."

" When was that ? "

" Three quarters of an hour after you had left. Your partner, M. de Saint Senier, and his wife had gone. If you want to see him you have only to wait, for he said that he would be back this morning."

" Good, I will have a serious talk with him."

" And I beg, sir, that you will tell him to let me alone. I will take the horse to him at the weigh-house, but here I don't want anyone to touch him. No one shall come near him. Last night the Viscountess wanted to look at him, but I refused to let her. She said her husband would send me away, but I turned my back on her, and would not let her into the stable."

" The Viscountess ! what Viscountess ? " cried Sartilly.

" The Viscountess Saint Senier," answered the boy quietly.

" What ? Was she here last night ? "

"Yes, she came about eleven, and did not go away until two this morning."

"Was she with her husband?"

"Her husband? no! if he had given orders to open the stable I should have obeyed him, as I do you."

"Was she alone, then?"

"No, she came with another lady, a baroness."

"What did they come for?"

"For supper, over at the hotel; they drank a lot, and afterwards sent for a gentleman, who went up and drank with them."

"What gentleman?"

"I don't know him."

"Did they bring him with them?"

"No; he came after they did, and they went without him. He slept here."

Sartilly could no longer doubt that the gentleman was George Cézambre, and he did not question the boy further. He knew sufficient of Mme. de Saint Senier to feel astonished at nothing that she did, but he was glad to hear of this last freak of hers, as it gave him a hold on her in case she should ever turn against him. Not that he intended to report her conduct to her husband—a gentleman does not do such things; besides, Saint Senier's philosophy had hardened him to occurrences of that kind. But Sartilly had begun to think of a plan which he could not execute without his partner's consent. His idea was to leave him after Snowflake's victory, so as to regain his liberty of action, and to be able, as circumstances turned out, either to exile himself, according to his agreement with his father-in-law, or else to give up a share in a stable which might be beyond his means. He hoped that a signal success would facilitate this retirement, and that Saint Senier would take the whole affair on his own shoulders. And in a case like this even the little influence that his wife exercised over Saint Senier might be of service. She was very wealthy, and the Count might be compelled to apply to her for funds to carry out the matter, and if Gontran whispered a word or two of this supper party in her ear it might induce her to be more amenable to reason. This was certainly looking some way ahead, but Sartilly felt that he must not neglect a single chance. His mind, too, was full of fresh food for thought since he had been talking with Dick. The lad had evidently accused Mowbridge in perfect good faith, and it was necessary for Sartilly to inquire into these allegations, though he did not believe in them. The jockey was to be here in the course of the morning, and he would wait for him, and question him on his arrival. The

Count flattered himself that he exercised a certain ascendancy over his inferiors, so that they obeyed him passively. He had, he asserted, a peculiar way of looking at them which prevented them from lying, and Dick was perhaps the only one who had disputed this ascendancy. "My boy," said he, changing his tone, so as to smooth down Dick, whom he had no wish to annoy, "the amusements of these ladies don't concern you. You were quite right not to let them see the horse, and I am much obliged to you for telling me of Mowbridge's conduct. As long as Snowflake is in your charge, you are responsible for him. But I can hardly believe that Mowbridge meditates anything of the kind you suggest. What interest could he have in doing so?"

"He may have been promised money—lots of money. The thing is done every day."

"In England perhaps, but not in France."

"He may have laid against the horse."

"It isn't easy for a jockey to do that. The bookmakers would distrust him."

"Unless he went halves with them."

This reply made Sartilly think for a moment of a coalition between Oxwall and Mowbridge, but he dismissed it at once. Oxwall had been paid, and was not likely to engage in a dangerous affair in which his former debtor had refused to take part.

"Yes," replied Gontran, "of course there is reason in what you say; but suppose Mowbridge was scoundrel enough to betray us, and had found some one to pay him for doing so, he would run a great risk, for if he attempted to pull his horse during the race everyone would see it, and he would be debarred from riding anywhere again, besides the chance of being torn to pieces by the infuriated backers."

"Oh! but he wouldn't try that game. He would endeavour to do the last feed of hay trick."

"And what is that, pray?"

"The simplest and the best of all. Whilst the horse is eating, someone puts small grains of opium on his tongue. He won't be ill next day, but he will have no heart left in him. He must have this given him the last thing before the race, so of course it is necessary to square the boy who is in charge of him."

Sartilly started. The abominable trick that Dick had described was exactly what Oxwall had proposed to him, and the bottle containing the grains of opium was still in his desk, for he had never thought of returning it to Oxwall or of throwing it away.

"But that danger is now over," continued Dick. "I am

sure that no one has been in the stable, and I will not leave my horse until I hand him over at the weighing-house. Mowbridge can then do what he likes, but if Snowflake is beaten, it is not my fault."

"You are a good lad," returned Gontran, "and I will reward you, although you have a very bad temper."

"I don't want anything in that way. Only give me a good character when I leave, and I shall be satisfied."

"You shall not leave me. I—— But who is that negro who is looking at us?" asked he, interrupting himself.

"That," said the boy, "is the servant of the gentleman who slept here last night. He isn't troubling his head about us, and has only come out to smoke his pipe until his master thinks fit to get up."

"You have seen him before then?"

"Yes, he came into the bar while I was there, and he heard Mme. de Saint Senier threaten me because I would not let her see the horse, as he will tell you if you ask him."

CHAPTER XXXIV

AN HONEST JOCKEY

EVEN if the Count had wished to question Domingo he would not have had time, for the negro disappeared almost as quickly as he had come, and at that instant his attention was attracted by Mowbridge opening the gate of the paddock. As soon as Dick perceived him he remarked briefly: "The horse has had enough exercise. I shall take him in now."

"All right, my boy," replied Sartilly, "take him in, and do not leave him for a moment. I am going to have a talk with Mowbridge."

Dick disappeared in a moment with Snowflake, and Gontran de Sartilly, going up to the gate, requested Mowbridge to come into the paddock. "For," said he, speaking in English, "I have something to say to you."

"I am at your service, my lord," answered the jockey in the same language, "and most happy to have met you."

He looked worn, but he was very calm, and his parchment-hued face told nothing. Keenly as Sartilly looked at him, he could not surprise any expression of embarrassment

on his features, and he was glad enough to come to the conclusion that the man had nothing to reproach himself with. People with an uneasy conscience find it hard to look you straight in the face, but Mowbridge's eyes never for a moment fell before the gaze of his employer.

"My dear fellow," said Gontran, "I beg you will tell me honestly what you think of our chance for the Produce Stakes."

"I think that we have an excellent one," answered Mowbridge boldly.

"I ask you this question because I intend to back my horse heavily. I have a large amount on him now, and if you have the least doubt of Snowflake's success, I will not go any deeper."

"I have no doubts on the subject, Count," answered the jockey. "Snowflake is certainly one of Floreal's best, and the sire was never beaten in England. He is in excellent form, and his last few gallops have been most assuring. Amongst the field there is not one capable of living in the race with him. Amongst them there is one, Cash-on-Delivery by Diamond, a thorough good horse, who will get a place, I think, and I will willingly take three to one on his coming in second, but as for his being a winner, I will take care to prevent that."

All this was said with an air of frankness and openness which impressed Sartilly favourably.

"Had I a large fortune, I would put the whole of it on Snowflake," continued the jockey, "and I expect his starting price will be five to one on, and even then I should do good business."

"You are wrong as to the odds, they have gone down."

"All the better for the sharp ones. It will be certain money."

"You think so?"

"I think it so much that I have put on him all I have."

"What, you have backed him?"

"Yes, my lord, I have backed our horse. If, by any impossible chance, he were beaten, I should lose all my savings, but I expect to double them."

"You did not say so yesterday."

"Yesterday? What did I say? I don't recollect."

"You said in public that Snowflake would lose **the race**."

"Where was that? Ah, I know now. It was in a tavern, was it not, before a lot of jockeys and trainers?"

"Yes."

"I suppose that your lordship had no difficulty in guessing why I spoke like that?"

"Well, I can't say I do."

"I have just told you that I have put as much on Snowflake as I could, and I would have put on more if I could have got better prices. It was therefore my intention that he should go back in the betting, and so I bragged about making my horse lose, for I knew very well that the fools who listened to me would hawk what I said all over the place. The better to persuade them that I was in earnest, I pretended to be drunk; they believed that I was so, and I expect to-day that the horse will be at evens. This is what I have done, and before the race I intended to let you know, so that you might act as you thought best."

"Oh! that is it, is it," muttered Sartilly only half-reassured.

"I would wager," added Mowbridge, with the utmost audacity, "that it is that young hound of a Dick who has repeated this to you."

"You would win that bet."

"As I shall win the others, as you will win yours. Dick knows how to do his work well enough, but Dick is a perfect fool, who cannot see beyond the tip of his nose, or, as you say in French, he takes bladders for lanterns; besides that, he hates me—I have never known why."

Sartilly began to comprehend the applications of that well-known maxim "Divide and Govern." Had these two men been friendly he would never have learned from one what the other had said in the tavern, nor would he have heard these explanations, which seemed to him entirely satisfactory. It therefore only remained for him to strike the grand blow in speaking of the present that he proposed to make the jockey if he pulled off the race.

"I would not mind making another bet," continued Mowbridge with a smile, "and that is, that Dick puts no faith in me, and will not let me come near Snowflake. I am delighted that the boy has got such an idea into his head, for I don't want even to see the horse before the race, and the rigorous watch which the poor boy will keep over him will prevent others getting near him whose proximity might be dangerous."

"Now you are talking sense, my dear John," cried Sartilly, "and the moment has come to tell you what I am going to do for you, if, as I do not doubt you will, you come in first. I shall win a large sum, and it is only fair that you should have your share of it."

"I thank you with all my heart, my lord, the more so that I did not look for anything of the kind, for M. de Saint Senier told me that it was not the custom in France to make any present to the jockey."

"M. de Saint Senier's ideas and mine do not agree on this point. What present used Lord Winter to make you after you had ridden a winner for him?"

"That depended on the importance of the race and the money he had on. Once after Ascot, I got a thousand pounds, but then Lord Winter had cleared ten thousand."

"This evening, after the race, I will hand over to you twelve hundred pounds, thirty thousand francs; is that sufficient?"

"It is too much, my lord."

"Not so, for if Snowflake wins I shall gain more than Lord Winter did on that day."

"Lord Winter has an income of a million francs a-year," objected the jockey.

Sartilly was surprised at the coldness with which the jockey received the intelligence of this almost royal gift.

"And I," said he, "have only three hundred thousand francs a-year, which, in England, would be looked on as a small thing, but here it is considered a very comfortable income, and I can therefore permit myself to be generous." Then, as Mowbridge scratched his head and made no reply: "Come, confess that you have been told that I am a ruined man?" continued the Count, looking him in the face. Mowbridge made a gesture of denial, but Sartilly did not credit him.

"The saddle galls him," thought he to himself, and had he had some of those thousand franc notes in his pocket-book which he had lost at play he would have given three or four of them to the jockey as an earnest of what he should receive; but, owing to that unfortunate evening, he had only some two hundred louis in his pocket. Nothing therefore remained for him but to play a bold game. "My dear Mowbridge," said he in a serious manner, "it is not my custom to confide my affairs to persons in my employ, but as I look on you as a gentleman, I may say a word or two to you. For the last few weeks I have, I confess, been pressed for money. I have dropped my money both at the tables and on the turf. But all I owe has now been paid up, including four thousand louis which I paid yesterday to Oxwall. I have now plenty of money in hand, and the twelve hundred pounds which I shall pay you after the race will in no way inconvenience me."

The name which the Count had just mentioned had a great effect on Mowbridge; he knew Oxwall perfectly, and determined to go and ask him if M. de Sartilly had settled with him. For the moment the treacherous jockey was in a great state of perplexity. He asked himself which course

would pay him the best, and he almost had made up his mind that it would be safest to run straight. By doing so he would pocket the Count's thirty thousand francs, and also retain the ten thousand that he had received on account. The person who had given them to him dared not make any complaint. Mowbridge therefore ran no risk, and had it been merely a question of swindling an unknown person, he would not have hesitated for a moment. But there was Malvina, and she would not submit to any deviation from his given word, and would certainly take some terrible vengeance on him should he do so. She was perfectly capable of insulting him publicly on the course, and in any case she would refuse to ratify the loving promise she had made him. Farewell then the dinner after the race, farewell the happy meeting and everything. It would be too bitter a thing to renounce these joys and to have gazed into the promised land without being permitted to enter it.

"You can trust to me as I trust in you," continued Sartilly. "Be at Longchamps early, and meet me at the weighing-house, and we will have a last talk. You shall tell me how you intend to ride Snowflake, and I will give you my ideas as to the best way to defeat his competitors, only one of whom is, I think, to be dreaded."

"Cash-on-Delivery, you mean ; but I am not afraid of him."

Sartilly was about to explain to Mowbridge, who knew a great deal better than he did, what he ought to do to win the race, when an unexpected apparition cut short his speech. A little while before Domingo had come to the fence of the paddock, but he had not dared to enter it. And then, after the man, came the master, for it was George Cézambre who now made his appearance. Gontran did not know the motive that had brought the youthful lover of Diana to the paddock, but he had no desire to avoid him, and, as he foresaw that the conversation might prove an angry one, he prepared himself for it. "Very well, then, my dear fellow," said he to Mowbridge, "we will resume this conversation shortly at Longchamps. That gentleman who has just made his appearance has evidently something to say to me, and I must find out what he wants."

Mowbridge was only too glad to make his escape, and bade his master a temporary farewell, with many protestations of his devotion.

CHAPTER XXXV

"IS SHE WORTH IT?"

As soon as he had left, Sartilly advanced to meet George, who, on his part, came up with his head erect and his brow clouded with anger. One detail of his appearance struck Gontran, whose keen eye allowed nothing to escape him, and this was that the young man wore a white tie, and that his unbuttoned overcoat showed that he was in evening dress. He had put on this the evening before when going to the club, where it was not thought good form to appear in morning attire after six o'clock. He had evidently not changed his dress since he had left the baccarat table, and so Sartilly concluded that he had not returned to the Auteuil villa during the night, and wondered for a moment how he had passed it. But George allowed him no time for conjecture. He came up to him, and without any preliminary began the conversation in this aggressive manner :

"I have an explanation to demand of you."

"On what subject, if you please?" asked Gontran.

"Mlle. de Ganges left Auteuil yesterday at three o'clock on horseback, and she has not yet returned."

"I am sorry for you, but what have I to do with it?"

"You must tell me where she is."

"I am entirely ignorant. You did not place her in my guardianship, and if she has chosen not to come back——"

"But I know where she is!"

"Well, if you know, why do you ask me?"

"She is at your house."

"Do you think so?" asked the Count in his most insolent manner.

"I am sure of it," answered George, who began to see that he was getting worsted in this battle of words.

"If you are sure I will not venture to contradict you," returned Sartilly, with the same air of sarcasm. "But what are you trying to get at?"

"I want satisfaction."

"Satisfaction for what?"

"For your ungentlemanly conduct."

"Really, sir, your conduct is too extravagant. Even

admitting that Mlle. de Ganges is at my house, you do not, I suppose, accuse me of having carried her off by force? Had I done so, your best course would have been to denounce me to the police authorities. It would not have been exactly the abduction of a minor, for the lady whom you are seeking for is of an age to consult her own wishes, but still, it would be an abduction; and provision is made for such a crime by our criminal code, and it would then be my turn to ask you for your reasons for accusing me of so villainous an action."

"I do not impute anything of the kind to you; I am quite ignorant of what occurred in the Bois de Boulogne——"

"Ah! then it was in the Bois de Boulogne that——"

"Mme. de Saint Senier told me last night in this house, that you had met Mlle. de Ganges yesterday at four o'clock in the Bois de Boulogne."

"Amiable Countess, how well I recognise your handiwork!"

"Was this true or not?"

"I do not see that I am obliged to answer you, for should I say 'yes,' it would not follow that I had carried off my wife's late companion, who might easily have come with me of her own free will, and in that case I do not see what cause you have to complain of me."

"Mlle. de Ganges was my mistress."

"Certainly, no one denies that; but I am not your friend, indeed I hardly know you. You were introduced to me by M. de Senier, and we exchanged a word or two. Last night you won a great deal of money from me at baccarat, which perhaps you may consider placed us on an intimate footing. It is true that some time back you introduced yourself into my house under circumstances which gave me the right to kill you on the spot had I been able to catch you. It is not, therefore, this nocturnal adventure that has cemented our intimacy. I have never therefore, been compelled by social etiquette to have any care or regard for you; and in taking your mistress, I have not been wanting in any of the courtesy which one gentleman owes to another. If I became—which Heaven forbid—the lover of Mme. de Saint Senier, her husband would have the right to demand satisfaction, and I should not refuse him, for I have lived on intimate terms with him for the last ten years; but you, sir, are an entire stranger to me, and I owe you nothing, not even an expression of regret, for anything that may have occurred."

George began to perceive that he had made a false start, and that in this stormy scene his was not the most dignified position, for he was not of sufficient experience to stand his ground against an adversary like Gontran, who was able to preserve all his coolness, because he had no love for any one,

and who was a perfect master of language from being accustomed to the world, and to all manner of difficult positions. Had he not overcome the resistance of his father-in-law, and were the attacks of a boy of twenty, utterly unacquainted with the world, to drive him from his position? He knew well what he was doing in permitting him to believe that Diana had of her own free will sought the protection of the Count de Sartilly. He had stated the fact openly to Lisa, and he felt that the day would not pass without Lisa telling her young master what had passed between them, who would then curse Diana, and refuse to see the faithless woman again. It was, therefore, best to come to a finish with the infatuated lover, so he continued: "Believe me, sir, that if I refuse to fight you, it is because a duel will injure us both very much in the eyes of the world, and might also prove prejudicial to—one in whom you are interested. I certainly have reason to complain of you, but I have not cherished any resentment, and I have not the slightest personal animosity against you. If you have any against me, you are wrong, for permit me to tell you that it is not on me that you should vent your anger for an unpleasantness that you have been subjected to for the first, but I daresay not for the last time in your life. Later on, when you have had more experience, you will know what women are worth, and will more easily console yourself for their infidelities."

As he thus preached to his unfortunate rival the advantages of resignation, Gontran eagerly watched his expression, and saw that his eloquence had not been entirely lost.

"Besides," added he with a smile, "if you absolutely insist on a duel, I will not baulk you. A meeting of that kind gives a young man just entering life a certain position; and I can therefore understand your trying to bring one about. Only the present excuse would be a bad one, and we can easily find a better. As long as you continue to lead a fashionable life in Paris, remember the saying: 'He who has a woman on his hands, has also war.' You will no doubt, have many more mistresses, and amongst them you may perhaps find one who will be worth drawing your sword for."

These last words, uttered with such subtle treachery, wounded George to the heart. The Count evidently meant that Diana was not worth fighting for, and George began to believe that he might after all be right. If, as everything seemed to point out, Diana had, after a short conversation with the Count, consented to follow him, she was of no more account than those nymphs who, driving round the lakes, seek their lovers amongst the passers-by.

"I repeat to you, sir," continued Sartilly, "that, if you

insist upon it, I shall not refuse you satisfaction, though I contend that I owe you none, and as an explanation for our reasons, we can say that I trod on your foot, or that you looked at me askance. It will be a foolish excuse, but a better one than fighting about a woman, and I certainly don't want to be laughed at."

Then, as George still remained silent, he went on: "I therefore will hold myself at your disposition, in two or three days. If I ask this delay, you can well understand it is not to shirk out of the affair. You are aware that I have a horse entered in one of the races to be run to-day at Long-champs, and I shall spend all my time on the course, and to-morrow I shall have no time at my disposal, not even an hour to myself, for I shall have to settle and to send back my horse to Mortcerf, where M. de Saint Senier and I have an extensive training stable. I therefore beg you not to send your seconds to me before Tuesday or Wednesday, if you still persist in your intention after having thought well over it during that time. And now, sir, permit me to leave you. I have some last orders to give to my stud-groom, and I am anxious to get back to Paris." With these words the Count turned round on his heels, whilst the miserable George turned and fled like a madman.

"Betrayed," muttered he, "she has betrayed me! It was sufficient for her to meet this man once again—ah! she has never loved me."

Lisa could have undeceived him; but Lisa was hanging about the neighbourhood of the house in the Avenue d'Eylau, watching for Francis, to tell her the truth about Mlle. de Ganges.

CHAPTER XXXVI

INDECISION

WHO has not seen the race for the Grand Prix? The appearance and the humours of this day have been described a hundred times, and the day has become as popular as the public fêtes in the Champ Elysées or the Champ de Mars used to be. And that day is not the only one that attracts its thousands. From April to June each Sunday is marked by an enormous exodus amongst the Parisians, who emigrate

in vast numbers by every means of locomotion to the far-spreading course of Longchamps. The rain, which injures the roads and puts out the fireworks, does not stop the lovers of racing. They come all the same, and tramp bravely through the mud ; but when it is a fine day there is even a denser crowd. And on this morning, the day after Diana had met with her accident, the sun rose bright and clear in a pure sky. Fifty thousand spectators had massed themselves together to witness Snowflake's victory. As usual, the bookmakers had been amongst the first comers. About twelve o'clock they had taken up their positions near the tent of Rouzé, the lemonade seller to the Society for the Improvement of the Breed of Horses. There are bookmakers of all classes, from the highest to the lowest. From the lemonade seller's tent extend four long streets, if we may so call them, of bookmakers, containing something over four hundred of them.

Of course, here as elsewhere there are places reserved for the more eminent men of the profession, and the ends of these streets are occupied by men of known standing and respectability. These generally have a good and extensive connection, and book heavy bets. Further off are others who will take small bets of five francs, or even less. There is generally some eagerness amongst the bookmakers to commence business early, and those who do so, usually contrive to reap the greatest benefit. The true aristocracy of the bookmakers however has its quarters near the weighing-house. These men sometimes realize enormous profits, but occasionally experience gigantic losses ; for example, when all the favourites come in winners, and when they do business on credit with well-known sporting men, who do not always settle promptly, sometimes not at all. Oxwall knew what he was about very well ; this skilful man had a foot in each of the two camps. He did business more in the weighing-house where he met his wealthiest customers, but he did not disdain the course in pursuance of the principle that little brooks make great rivers. This day, as he was going to fight a tremendous battle over the Produce Stakes, he was here, there, and everywhere, taking up all Snowflake's backers, the odds upon the horse having only fallen a little, but fighting rather shy of laying against Cash-on-Delivery. He believed that Mowbridge's concurrence had been obtained, and imagined he was acting on a certainty. He felt the more certain from having seen Malvina, when first he came upon the course, hanging about the enclosure round the weighing-house, so as to have a word with the jockey as he passed, and to keep him steadfast to his promise by fresh engagements. Malvina had gone security for Mowbridge, and was

to be trusted. Oxwall had also met the Count de Sartilly, and had politely offered to take all he might wish to lay on Snowflake. On his side Sartilly relied absolutely on the fidelity of his jockey. Which was the one who was deceiving himself, the Count or the bookmaker? for since the promise of thirty thousand francs, Mowbridge had been in a state of indecision.

After his conversation with George, the Count, who was highly pleased with himself, had returned to Paris, and breakfasted at the Café Anglais with an excellent appetite.

He did not wish to return home until the close of the day which was to decide his future. What could he do then? He had made all arrangements to prevent Mlle. de Ganges from communicating with anyone outside, and the doctor had declared that he could not until to-morrow give any opinion regarding the injured girl.

Sartilly therefore drove back straight to Longchamps, and arrived there in time for the first race.

There were five races, and the Produce Stakes was the third on the list. He had therefore plenty of leisure to make inquiries on all sides as to the state of the odds, to get on his money, and to talk with all his club acquaintances, so as, if possible, to silence the sinister rumours of all kinds which were still flying about. His object was to show himself as much as possible. He was dressed in most correct sporting costume, more haughty than ever, and perfectly confident in himself, for he well knew from experience that in a position of difficulty he must by force of manner crush fools and cow evil-speakers. He commenced his business by going and looking at the ladies of good society who were seated in the stands; talking for a few seconds with some of the fast ladies of the highest standing, to show that neither his domestic troubles nor the tightness of the money market had for a moment had any effect upon the irresistible Sartilly, who had always retained the reputation of a victor in every respect. And in this he had succeeded, for no one thought for a moment that there was anything wrong with Snowflake's running, and the horse still held its place in the betting. Sartilly would have preferred that his horse should have gone back in the market, for he could then have put on an amount which in the case of his winning would have relieved him at once from all his embarrassments.

M. de Saint Senior appeared to be less confident, though he had backed the horse for a heavy sum; he had escorted his wife to the grand stand, and had taken up his position at the weighing-house, where he hoped that she would not come to trouble him.

On his way thither Gontran had come across a man that he would willingly have dispensed with meeting, and that was Henri Trévières, whom two months previously he had run through the shoulder. The meeting had been unexpected, and both men had feigned not to see each other ; but Gontran could not refrain from enquiring if this man, who had been formerly almost betrothed to Valentine, and who was still an intimate friend of M. Vacheron's, had not been set on to dog his footsteps as a spy, so that he might report his manner of acting since he had signed the agreement. At any rate, this was not the moment to seek a fresh quarrel with him, and he was not letting his mind dwell on the meeting, but was making his way to the enclosure, when he felt himself pulled by the sleeve. It was Mme. de Saint Senier, accompanied by the inevitable Baroness, and as she pulled his sleeve she whispered, "And so you have carried off the beautiful Diana !"

Sartilly was half inclined to answer her rather rudely ; but he was anxious to avoid a scene, and so he said nothing.

"Her lover is looking for her everywhere," continued the Viscountess, without the smallest amount of reticence. "Just fancy, last night at the Madrid ——"

"Yes, yes, I know all that story," interrupted Gontran. "I was this morning at Borne's, and they told me all about it. By a piece of good fortune your husband was not with me at the time."

"And do you think that my husband would have been angry with me because I had supper at the Bois with a lady friend ? Why, my dear fellow, where can you have sprung from ? You ought to know that there is not an ounce of jealousy in Saint Senier. He is not like your fine George Cézambre. Aha ! there is a sucking Othello for you ! How he is running after his red-haired woman ! He was walking about the Bois all night——"

"Yes, and you took care to tell him that Mlle. de Ganges was at my house. It was most kind of you !"

"What ! you have heard that ? Then you have seen the distracted lover ?"

"Yes, Madame ; I saw him this morning, and he has tried to pick a quarrel with me, thanks to the information with which you supplied him."

"You are angry with me ?"

"Not at all. If the fellow wants a lesson he shall have one, but later on. And I shall be pleased if you will for the future cease to interfere with my actions, and if my request has not sufficient weight with you, I shall have to apply to your husband."

"There you go, and threaten me with Old Bogey; but, remember that to-morrow the secret you affect to hold will be worth nothing. I mean with reference to this—shall we say elopement. The more you try to hide it, the more the story will get abroad, and I warn you that you will not easily get rid of the little creole, for he is here now."

"What, is he on the course?"

"Certainly; I saw him on the lawn, lost in the crowd that came in at a shilling a-head. He is wandering about like a soul in purgatory."

Gontran hardly expected to hear that George Cézambre had come to the races, and he wondered what could have induced him to do so.

"Are you surprised that he has come to Longchamps?" asked Mme. de Saint Senier with a smile. "Do you suppose that he would have shut himself up in his cottage at Auteuil to weep over his vanished mistress? You have not judged him rightly. He may be full of sentimentality, dear boy, but he has any amount of pluck, like all his fellow countrymen."

Sartilly felt half inclined to reply "Then he resembles you;" but he restrained himself because he had no time to waste.

"Yes," continued Mme. de Saint Senier, "instead of resigning himself he is looking everywhere for his fine red girl and I tell you that he will look for her until he finds her, for he says that you are not the man to conceal your successes and that Diana is not the woman to hide herself, hence he expects to find her in an open carriage alongside the course. If he finds her, there will be a pretty set-to, and if you don't care to be mixed up in it, dear boy, I advise you not to quit the weighing enclosure."

"Mlle. de Ganges is not here," answered Gontran, "so your creole will have his search in vain."

"What," said the lady, "has she stayed at home? Do you mean that she has missed this opportunity of showing herself in all the splendour of her changed circumstances? I did not believe that she was so modest, and I cannot understand how she could make up her mind to deprive herself of so public a triumph, for it would be a real triumph, would it not? She was only a companion to the Countess, and she has taken her place entirely, and heaven knows that was enough to turn her head and induce her to show herself at Longchamps, had it only been for the sake of vexing your wife."

Gontran now lost his patience entirely, and endeavoured to break away from this malevolent woman, but she went on—

"For your wife is here."

"Have you seen her?" asked Sartilly, eagerly.

"No, but she is sure to put in an appearance. Why, I have just seen her old lover, M. Trévières, the man you gave such a pretty sword-thrust to three weeks ago. But he is all right now? Why, he doesn't even wear his arm in a sling, and if, as I wouldn't mind betting, the Countess has come here privately, I am pretty sure that it is to meet him. She is very likely hidden in a closed carriage, and has sent him out to reconnoitre. She wants to know what you are going to do with your horse, and what chance he has of winning. You will meet her emissary at the weighing-house, and then——"

"Madame," interrupted Gontran, driven to desperation, "you compel me to tell you that your behaviour is abominable. I have listened to you from courtesy, but even that has its limits, and I beg you for the future never to address me again, as I will not answer you."

With these words he plunged into the crowd, leaving the Viscountess to complain of his discourtesy to the little Baroness, who laughed in her sleeve at the snub that her friend had sustained. Sartilly believed that Mme. de Saint Senier was not wrong in asserting that Valentine had come to the race, and he would have been pleased had she done so, but he would willingly have known it for certain, even had she come there under the escort of her former lover, for he might then have profited by such a piece of imprudence on her part; but he had much to do before he could verify the fact, and there were matters that just now were of more importance to him than Valentine.

He therefore went into the weighing enclosure, which everyone was just then leaving to see the first race run. The jockeys had now left the scales, and were already mounted, and moving towards the starting-post. The place was almost empty, and Mme. de Saint Senier, instead of following him, had retired with the Baroness to their seats in the Grand Stand. Sartilly looked for Mowbridge, whom he had not seen since the morning, and who ought now to be here, for Snowflake had already arrived under the charge of Dick, and was being walked up and down until the saddling bell rang. He could not see his jockey anywhere, but his friend Mussidan came up to him and drew him aside with a pre-occupied air. "My dear fellow," said he, "I am most uneasy. The adverse rumours are gaining ground, and the story is going about that Mowbridge has been bought over by one of your opponents, and that he will not ride on the square."

"That is ridiculous," returned Sartilly; "but how can I stop the mouths of fools and liars?"

"Yes, but that is not all."

"What more can they say?"

"Why, on my soul, I have heard fellows say that you have laid against your horse; they are full of it over there."

"I should like to know who ventures to say so, and if you could point out one to me you would be doing me a great favour. I would treat him in such a manner as would close his mouth, and prevent others from beginning to talk any more."

"I should be glad enough to give you their names, but I don't know them myself. People can come in here as they like. All they have to do is to pay twenty francs. It is impossible to know everyone that you meet, but I tell you again that the thing is talked about everywhere, especially amongst the bookmakers."

"I hope that William Oxwall is not amongst those who accuse me?"

"Oh, no, he has denied the thing pretty sharply, and has asserted that you have backed Snowflake heavily."

"He is right, and I will put on more yet if I can find any of them ready to take me."

"Oxwall is ready. He is ready to take all bets from those who want to back your horse, and he gives better prices. With the others it is four to one, whilst he does business at ten to one. So everyone crowds round him, and he is willing to do business with all of them. If Snowflake wins Oxwall must smash up, however big a sum he may have at his back, for his losses will be simply enormous."

"Do you complain of that?" asked Sartilly, ironically.

"Certainly not; but his behaviour makes me uneasy. Oxwall is too fly to go head-long to ruin in the way he is, and if he is laying as he is doing, it is because he has the straight tip, which we have not got."

Sartilly could say nothing to refute this line of argument, but he obstinately refused to see the danger which his friend pointed out to him.

"Pooh, pooh," cried he. "Oxwall is as likely to make a mistake as anyone else. He has put faith in the rumours from the stable, the origin of which I know."

"What, you know how they came about?"

"Yes, my dear fellow: the person who has set them going is as much interested as I am in Snowflake's winning, for he has laid heavily on him and wants to get some more on. In talking as he does he has had no other reason than to get his money on at better prices; the trick is not a very fair one, but it has succeeded, since the horse has gone back in the betting."

"Ah," muttered Mussidan, "are you sure of this?"

"Believe me, my dear fellow, the layers will learn to their cost what the rumours that are going about are worth. Oxwall will be had on toast. As for the insinuations against me I disdain them, and as a proof I shall make a point of showing myself openly during the race."

"Well said, and I will be at your side; but it seems to me that your partner Saint Senier ought to be with you. Where the deuce is he?"

"I was talking with him a short time ago, he can't be far off; perhaps he has left here to avoid his wife whom I just now met."

"Yes, I can understand that," exclaimed Mussidan, entirely re-assured. "He has no fears, and I am glad, for he is fidgety, and sometimes gets 'funky,' and I had rather that his serenity should not be disturbed. And now I must leave you; I see our jockey down there, and I wish to give him his last orders as Saint Senier is not here. You are perfectly satisfied, eh?"

"As far as a man can be who has risked forty thousand francs to win ten thousand; at any rate I live in hope; but see, they have started. I must hurry and see them come in."

Sartilly gladly allowed him to leave, and hurried to where he saw Mowbridge, who appeared to be searching for his employer. He had on his racing attire (yellow jacket with red bands and green cap), and in this costume his meagre frame looked like a monkey dressed up as a parrot. "I have been waiting for you," said Gontran, angrily.

"Excuse me, my lord," answered Mowbridge, without appearing at all embarrassed, "I have been stopped by two or three bookmakers who wanted to make me talk, and I had great trouble in getting rid of them."

"I am not at all astonished that they should have questioned you, for they tell me that you are going to lose this race on purpose."

"All the better if they believe it. You can then get on at evens up to the start. The rot that I talked in the tavern has taken effect, it seems."

This was said with such an air of truth that Sartilly had no more doubts as to the honesty of his jockey. "Well," said he, "let us drop that. How do you intend to ride Snowflake: do you mean to hold him in, or to let him have his head from the beginning?"

Mowbridge started back like a barrister who is pestered by a client before the trial, who wants to know how he is going to open the case. "My lord," said he, gravely, "since

you do me the honour of asking me my intentions, this is what I intend to do. Snowflake is an admirable horse, a perfect horse; he has speed and bottom. Cash-on-Delivery his only dangerous opponent, is perhaps a little quicker, but he has less staying power. I accordingly think that I should try and tire him out. I shall therefore press him hard at the beginning, so as to make his jockey believe that I intend to make the running. He will at once begin to push him, and I shall play my game at the start. I shall then relax my efforts a little so as not to be distanced, and let him gain a couple of lengths—no more, for Cash-on-Delivery is a grand horse. I shall pick him up again at the descent, we shall be neck-and-neck at the last turn, and I shall win in the straight run in by a head, without using whip or spur."

"Excellent," exclaimed Sartilly, "I can see the whole race before me, as you do, and I am certain you will beat Cash-on-Delivery; as for the others they are not in it."

"Not one of them. I know the lot, and I don't think there is a 'dark horse' amongst them, and therefore, I hope that your lordship approves of my plan?"

"Perfectly, it was just the one that I should have proposed."

"It is the best, indeed the only one. Your lordship will not therefore be alarmed if Cash-on-Delivery seems to walk away from me at the beginning?"

"I shall be so little alarmed that I shall take advantage of the opportunity to put more money on, if there is any one simple enough to take my offers."

"That is a new dodge," replied Mowbridge, with a smile, "and I would do the same, only one can't bet on horseback."

"Well, well, you know that I have engaged to prevent your losing anything. I shall have the greatest pleasure in handing you the thirty thousand francs I promised you after the race, for you will have earned them honestly, and I shall be your debtor. I shall give you them out of my own pocket, and have not even said a word about them to my partner."

The jockey's eyes shone brilliantly, and Gontran guessed, that unbelieving as Mowbridge had been up to the last moment, he now put faith in the promise, when he knew that M. de Saint Senier had nothing to do with this liberal present.

If Mowbridge changed his mind, Oxwall would have to be the loser by this new decision, and the only hope for the bookmaker was that Malvina should see the jockey before the race was run. "I thank you, my lord," answered Mowbridge, "and I beg that you will rely on me; have you any other instructions to give me?"

"None. You are aware that the committee have decided that you are to carry six pounds, on the plea that your weight is ———"

"Yes, yes, my lord, I know that ; don't be alarmed, Snowflake can carry that easily enough, and ten more if necessary ; but now if you will permit, I will go and have a look at the horse, for I see that the second race is over, and this place will soon be crammed."

"Go, my good fellow. I will await you here. Come back in a quarter of an hour."

Mowbridge hastened to get away in the direction in which the privileged bookmakers had taken their stations, on the outside of the enclosure. He had on his arrival noticed Oxwall surrounded by eager backers, but he had not dared to go up to him, lest he should be accused of plotting with him ; but he earnestly desired to say two words to him before starting, for though he had no longer any doubts as to the generosity of M. de Sartilly, he could not yet quite believe in his solvency, and he was determined to learn if the Count had, as he affirmed, paid the four thousand louis that he owed to Oxwall. The moment was a propitious one. The backers had moved away on to the course, and Oxwall had just lighted a cigar during this brief respite. "Well," exclaimed Oxwall, "so it seems that you are going to win the Produce Stakes in a canter?"

"One is never sure of anything," answered the jockey, modestly.

"And very lucky too, for where should we bookmakers be if the favourites were always the winners? I don't mind telling you, my boy, that if your horse wins, I shall be ruined root and branch, but of course in our business we have to take some risks."

"It will put some money into my master's pocket, and it seems that he wants it badly enough."

"Well, no, things are not so bad as that, he dropped a lot at the earlier Spring Meetings, but he has picked himself up somehow, and the proof of it is, that he paid me yesterday the eighty thousand francs that he owed me."

Oxwall was a sharp man, and yet he did not see that in saying this he acted like a schoolboy. He imagined that Mowbridge had been gained over by the seductions of Malvina, and bound hand and foot by the large sum that he had received on account, and he never for a moment suspected that he would break the promise that he had made, and that the fact of telling him the actual resources of the Count de Sartilly, would decide him to act faithfully and honourably. Mowbridge said no more on the

subject, but decided within himself to earn the Count's promised reward, and keep the money that Malvina had brought him, though he was willing to spend it with her. He therefore exchanged a few trivial remarks with the bookmaker, and went off to Snowflake, who was being walked about the paddock by his lad. Now that he had determined to act on the square, he was not going to neglect anything to make his winning a dead certainty, for your experienced jockey never omits to examine and caress his horse the last thing before mounting it. Dick, who perceived Mowbridge, whom he detested, coming up to him, continued to walk his horse up and down, and Mowbridge was about to tell him to stop, when he heard a voice calling out, "John, John." He turned sharply round, and saw Malvina, leaning against the railings of the paddock making signs to him to come and speak to her.

Mowbridge was not half-pleased with this invitation for he foresaw that Malvina had come there to remind him of his promise, and to cross-examine him with the view of finding if he was still steadfast to his engagement. He had, however, no means of avoiding this, unless, indeed, he broke with his fair friend entirely, and this he had no desire to do. He thought that as he would have to tell her the truth some time or other, he might as well do so before the race, so as to give her the chance of acting accordingly, and he hoped to persuade her to come over with him to the side of M. de Sartilly. He therefore went up to her, and as he did not care to talk across the railings, he left the paddock, and took her into a remote corner. Malvina at once opened the conversation. "What were you saying to Oxwall?" for she was anxious to learn if the jockey had found out that she had been sent to him by the bookmaker.

"I asked him if the Count had paid him the eighty thousand francs which he owed him?"

"Indeed, and what had that to do with you?"

"I wanted to know if he was solvent."

"What does that signify? You have not to look to him for a reward."

"He promised to give me thirty thousand francs if his horse came in first."

"Promising is one thing, and paying another. Your fine Count is not worth a rap."

"Yes, he is, for he paid Oxwall all right."

"All the more reason that he should have nothing left. You will be a fool if you count on getting anything from him, and besides you have promised to lose the race. Have you not had something on account? ten fine bank notes,

and the rest to be paid down this evening? What, you say nothing! Have you by chance any intention of throwing me over at the last moment?"

"No, but I have thought over it, and I think that we might arrange to get a profit on both sides."

"I don't understand you."

"And yet it is most simple. You have given me ten thousand on account; well, we will divide it, and I will give you the third of my thirty thousand francs for yourself. You will be a gainer by this, and I shan't risk being debarred from riding."

Mlle. Martingale flew into a rage at once. "Do you think that I would accept such an offer?" cried she. "Do you think that I am no better than you, you cowardly cur?"

"Not so loud, people may hear us," pleaded Mowbridge.

"I don't care," answered Malvina. "I wish I was in the centre of the ring, so that everybody might hear what a scoundrel you are, a rogue that sells himself to the highest bidder. Look here, just win the race and I will out with the whole truth. I have nothing to lose. No one can do anything to me, and I shouldn't care if they could. But you shall be kicked out, even if Sartilly tries to keep you, for the members of his club all think that there is something on between you and he. He'll have to turn you out, my little man, and he will take the opportunity not to pay you your thirty thousand francs that you count on, like a fool as you are. So you will have cheated me for nothing."

"You would not do that!"

"Would I not? As true as you are as ugly as an orang-outang, I would do so, even if it were only to show my employer that I was not in the swim with you."

"Your employer!" repeated Mowbridge.

"Yes, the man that gave me the money to pay for your bit of blackguardism. At least you can give it back to me."

"I have not got it about me, but I should much prefer to share it with you, as I proposed."

"But I won't have it. I am an honest girl in my way, and I prefer to show you up; and I won't hesitate to do so. And so you took a fancy to me, did you, and thought to do me without my paying you off? You make a mistake, little man, and it shall cost you dearly. And when I think of what you wanted besides the cash; this English owl must needs want a French dove, a Parisian lady. Malvina Martingale is meat for your masters, and as for your dinner, you may go and hang yourself."

Mowbridge was overwhelmed by this torrent of abuse, and cut but a sorry figure, and the threat to break off all

connection with him touched the most sensitive portion of his heart. He hesitated, and began to think that perhaps after all he had better throw over Sartilly, and revert to his first arrangement. Malvina noticed his indecision.

"Listen," said she, looking him full in the face, "I can hardly believe that you are a thief, and if you keep this money you will be nothing better, but you have yet time to turn yourself round. If you are going to throw us over, I must let my friend know, so that he may not get any deeper in the mire, and to do that I have not an instant to lose, for they are ringing the bell to clear the course for the third race. So decide."

"And if I let myself be beaten you will meet me this evening?"

"Of course I will; was it not agreed; I don't go back from my word."

"You will come, then, in spite of all the unkind things that you said just now?"

"What did I say? That you were ugly? Well, what of that; I suppose you do not pretend to be as handsome as the Apollo Belvedere. Besides, beauty does not mean money. Get along, I shall like you just the same."

These words so full of promise weighed down Mowbridge's last scruples.

"You wish it," said he, devouring Malvina with his eyes.

"Very well, then, Snowflake shall not win."

"Good; and I promise that you shall not repent making him lose."

"Only I warn you, that after the race, I shall maintain that it was not my fault that he was beaten."

"So that you may not be disqualified from riding again. I see no reason why you should not do so."

"You understand that I should like to get something on each side."

"The same as I want my ten thousand francs that have been promised me; that is only natural."

"Yes, but look here; suppose the person that is going to find the money refuses to pay up on the pretext that I did nothing to make the horse lose."

"Ha, ha! You think of everything, I see. Love does not make you lose your head! but re-assure yourself. I charge myself with explaining everything to our capitalist. He is an artful one, a regular old fox, who will perfectly understand that you can't go boasting about having sold the race. I don't know how you will arrange matters with Sartilly, but I give you my word that the other one shall pay up this very evening."

"Then rely on me. I know a means of doing it without compromising myself a bit."

"All right," answered Mlle. Martingale, who had learnt a few turf terms from the grooms and trainers. "Listen, there goes the bell. Go and get weighed, John. I shall get a place at the ropes, where I can see you come in second or third; for I suppose you are not going to get yourself distanced? that would be too ridiculous."

"This evening then."

"Yes, at the spot we agreed on;" and Malvina ran off merrily, whilst Mowbridge went to Snowflake, who, however, was not now alone with Dick. M. de Sartilly had at last come across his partner, and they were both talking with Dick, who, according to his custom, answered them only in monosyllables.

"Ah, here you are at last," said Saint Senier. "You ought to have been here half an hour ago."

"I was here three quarters of an hour ago," answered Mowbridge, coolly; "ask M. de Sartilly?"

Gontran hastened to plead in his favour, saying that he had been consulting him as to the best method of riding the race; but Saint Senier continued, addressing his conversation to the jockey: "I am much dissatisfied with you. You pass your time in drinking-places, gossiping with the grooms of other stables. I won't have this, and if you continue it, I shall have to dismiss you."

"As you like, sir," returned Mowbridge, less than ever disposed to put up with the bad temper of the man who had not promised him any reward for winning.

Sartilly nudged his companion as a hint that this was a bad time in which to find fault, and managed to make him keep quiet. The moment for weighing had now arrived, and Dick received orders to lead up Snowflake, and also to bring the saddle and bridle which are placed in the scales with the jockey. Twelve horses were entered for the Produce Stakes, and of these nine were coming to the post, so that the operation of weighing would necessarily take some time. Saint Senier, always disposed to quarrel, began to wrangle with one of the committee as to the weight Snowflake was to carry, and Sartilly turned to speak to Alfred de Mussidan, who came up at that moment.

"My dear fellow," said he, "you have converted me. I have just backed your horse for five hundred louis more."

"And you have done right. I have been talking to the jockey, and the thing is certain."

"I have got good prices too. So you have found Saint Senier, I see?"

"Yes, he is growling like a surly dog."

"Why, is he grieved at having left his wife for a moment?"

"I think he has heard these tales about Mowbridge, and, not being in the secret, he is angry with him, whereas we ought to thank him for enabling us to get our money on at a better price."

"Saint Senier is a brute," said Mussidan, who never stopped to pick his words.

"I won't contradict you ; but see, Mowbridge is in the scales. Let us get closer."

Mowbridge was being weighed, and the stewards were proceeding to arrange the extra weight that he was to carry. This is done by the insertion of pieces of lead into little pockets in the saddle cloth. Each piece of lead is of a fixed weight, so that it is very easy to put in the exact amount.

This was soon over, and Mussidan wished to draw Sartilly away to obtain a favourable position to see the race.

"I don't want to have that fellow Saint Senier next to me," said Mussidan.

"Nor I either. Let us leave him to squabble with the stewards and be off, though I should have liked to have said a last word to Mowbridge."

"My dear fellow, don't say too much to him. There are plenty of ill-disposed people about just now, who will assert that you are telling him to let his horse get beaten. Let Saint Senier go with him to the starting post. No one suspects him."

"No, but I fear that he will irritate Mowbridge, and if he is put out he never rides so well."

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE RACE

SARTILLY was not wrong when he dreaded the interference of his partner, for Saint Senier was just in the humour to find fault with everything, and though John Mowbridge did not attempt to retaliate, he had his revenge ready prepared ; besides, Gontran could do nothing to hinder the outbreak of his partner's bad temper, and he was confident in the favourable termination of the race after his last interview with

his jockey. He accordingly left the enclosure with Mussidan, and elbowed his way through the crowd to the place reserved for those who had horses entered for the races. Seats had been kept for them near that occupied by the President of the Committee of Stewards. Sartilly carried slung over his shoulders a powerful racing glass, which would enable him to watch the race from start to finish, and now he turned it on the immense crowd which blackened the lawn, and on the line of carriages drawn up alongside of the ropes. He had often before gazed on this curious spectacle, and it was not to admire it that he swept it with his glass. He had suddenly recollected that he had heard that M. Trévières was at Longchamps, and he wanted to find out if Valentine was here also. He would have been glad to catch sight of her, for more than one reason, yet look where he would, he could not manage to see her anywhere. But after some time he recognised Trévières, standing on the box of a closed cab and gazing eagerly at the stand, as if he were looking for some one. Was the Countess de Sartilly hidden in this cab? It was possible, though hardly probable. However, it was impossible for Gontran to assure himself of the fact, as to reach the cab he would have had to cross the course, which was now being cleared; besides, for the moment he had other matters to think about. The horses and their jockeys made their appearance, and moved slowly to the starting post, whilst, with his flag under his arm, the starter walked across to take up his position. All the nine horses that were to run were ready, and one or two of them were indulging in a preliminary canter.

A sudden movement took place amongst the general public, who moved in two different directions, some being anxious to witness the start, and the others the finish. The more aristocratic visitors remained in the weighing enclosure, where they could comfortably see the whole race. Sartilly and Mussidan were surrounded by their acquaintances, and the former noticed that many eyes were fixed upon him; it seemed as if he was watched with a feeling of unfriendly curiosity, and this was a convincing proof of the general belief that he had given his jockey orders to lose the race. It was all very well for him to have ostensibly backed Snowflake, but it was generally believed that he had laid heavily against him by commission. But he cared little for the opinions of the hostile and jealous element, for he felt sure that the victory of his horse would serve to utterly confound them. How he congratulated himself on having giving up his former project! Had he listened to that scoundrel Oxwall, and drugged his horse, he felt sure that he would not have

escaped from the crowd with his life. They would willingly have murdered him, and in a few minutes they would be ready to carry him in triumph.

A large number of the sporting fraternity had backed Cash-on-Delivery, and at a first glance it did not seem as if they had invested their money badly.

Cash-on-Delivery was a magnificent sorrel, with all the points of a fine horse about him. He was the property of a French trainer very popular in the sporting world, in which he enjoyed the reputation of being thoroughly honest and straightforward. He had secured the services of a well-known jockey, who had ridden many winning races. This jockey had a far higher reputation than Mowbridge, but was not so well built for his profession, and the extra weight which his opponent carried far more than counterbalanced this disadvantage. He cordially hated Mowbridge, who returned the compliment with interest, and he had in addition so great a contempt for him that had Malvina's lover attempted any roguery during the race, he would not have hesitated to denounce him to the stewards. There were many supporters of his black jacket, who hoped to welcome him as he passed the post as a winner. Whatever might be the result, it was certain that there would be a sharp struggle for the Produce Stakes, and, despite the implicit confidence that Sartilly placed in his horse and jockey, he was still far from easy in his mind.

Mussidan, on the contrary, had lost all his nervousness ; the assertions of Gontran had completely re-assured him, and all he was anxious for was to get more money on. The occasion offered itself before the horses got away, for grumbling Colonel Tarsac, who was standing just behind them exclaimed—

“ I will back Cash-on-Delivery for ten louis.”

“ Done with you for fifty if you like,” cried Mussidan.

“ No, sir, ten louis is enough for me. I do not gamble, I only wish to encourage the improvement in the breed of our own horses, and Cash-on-Delivery is not an English horse.”

“ Your patriotism will cost you ten louis, my old soldier,” muttered Mussidan, as he booked the bet.

The horses were ranged in line before the starter, who as is usually the case had much difficulty in starting them. There were two false starts, but at the third time, as the flag dropped, the nine competitors got away together. A partial silence soon succeeded the shouts which had greeted the first burst, and a dull low murmur arose, like the distant roar of the rising tide. Sartilly had lowered his glass, whilst Mussidan kept his to his eyes. Gontran wanted to see the

two favourites together so that he might judge if Mowbridge was following the tactics that it had been arranged before the race were to be followed. Mussidan, who had not been informed of the plan, followed every detail of the struggle, and loudly announced each event as it occurred. "They are both in front," exclaimed he, still gazing through his binocular. "Cash-on-Delivery on the inside ; what a pace they are going at ? I am astonished at the way Mowbridge is riding—he knows that his horse has any amount of staying power—what does he want to hustle him along like that for ? There he is ahead, but Cash-on-Delivery keeps well up to him. That is what I call good, honest running ; the rest are behind in two lots, quite out of the race."

"They are coming to the rise ; it is there that the race will be settled. Mowbridge slackens his pace, he is right ; the other still presses on, he gains a head, now a neck—ah, we shall see what we shall see—artful Mowbridge."

The spectators near the two gentlemen were all eyes for the race. The spectators on the lawns and the ladies in the carriages gazed after the horses, whose forms were now plainly delineated against the background of the trees. A confused shouting began to be heard, though it was hardly possible to distinguish the precise words.

"There is a length between them now," cried Mussidan.

"Snowflake is a length behind. Mowbridge is holding him in, and he knows what to do, as long as he does not hold him in too long."

"He has been bribed to keep him back," cried a voice ; and a hundred other voices took up the chorus that the jockey had been bribed, and the race was sold.

"It is a swindle. Wait until after the race, and——"

"Two lengths behind now," said Mussidan. "The race is lost. Ah ! the thief, if I had only known."

Sartilly never blenched. Mowbridge was doing exactly as had been arranged. He looked scornfully on those who surrounded him ; then his voice rang out clear and decisive, "A thousand louis, even, on Snowflake."

"Done with you," cried one of the largest speculators on the turf. He was the only one who took the bet, but the murmurs ceased as if by magic.

Sartilly, by this stroke of audacity, silenced those who were commencing to accuse him, and he hoped to gain the thousand louis which he had risked, as he had so many before them, for Mowbridge seemed again to be gaining ground.

Mussidan recovered his courage, and continued to announce the incidents of the race. "Now Mowbridge is letting out

his horse. Mowbridge is picking him up again ; it was a plant to pump the other. Cash-on-Delivery's jockey can feel that Mowbridge is almost on him, and is doing all he knows. His whip will soon be at work. Mowbridge is coming up hand over hand. How the fellow rides ; it looks as if he was lifting his horse along with his knees." Then all at once he exclaimed, "Halloa ! what is he doing now ; he is stooping over on the right side, and is only holding the reins in one hand—but there, he is upright in the saddle again. Ah ! I see it all. He thought that his saddle was turning, and felt the girth to be sure that it was all right. Now he is all right again, and Cash-on-Delivery is going to learn a lesson."

He was perfectly right. In a few bounds Snowflake, skilfully ridden, had come up with his opponent, and now that they had reached the descent, was gaining visibly on the sorrel, who was more than half blown. The opinions of the spectators of this exciting struggle began to change. Those who had been abusing Snowflake and his jockey were now silent, and would in a very little time commence to cheer him. Mowbridge had kept all his promises ; at the last turn he was knee to knee with his adversary, who was already at work on his horse ; and in the straight run in he passed him with seemingly hardly an effort, and won easily. It was a magnificent sight, and numberless voices hailed Snowflake's victory. Hats flew up in the air by dozens on the lawns, and even in the more select enclosures. Many a hand was stretched out to grasp Sartilly's, who was half mad with the joy that he strove to conceal ; but a little more and they would have borne him aloft in triumph.

The public spread over the course, and the winner of the race had some difficulty in forcing a passage to the weighing-house, where the stewards of the race were in waiting to verify the fact of the weights being the same as they had been at starting. Saint Senier was with his horse, for he had taken up a position close by the judge's chair to witness the triumph of his stable, and had made up his mind not to leave his horse again until it was extricated from the crowd. For sometimes disappointed turfites will endeavour at that instant to do away with some portion of the horse's equipments, so as to prevent the animal being proclaimed a winner, and an experienced owner will watch over his horse himself, and not permit anyone to touch him. And the number of the disappointed was very great. The majority of the backers had certainly put their money on Snowflake, but still a great number had fancied Cash-on-Delivery, the more so as the rumour had got about that Sartilly's jockey

was not going to ride fairly. These last were furious, and would willingly have ill-treated Mowbridge, whom they accused of having himself set these reports afloat. Nor were the bookmakers satisfied, for the victory of the favourite had cost them dear. Gontran was intoxicated with delight; he felt like the shipwrecked mariner who finds himself again on the surface after having sunk fifty feet below the surface of the waves. He had gained an enormous sum of money, which would enable him to set his father-in-law at defiance; and, to crown his joy, just as Snowflake came in he caught sight of Valentine perched on the box of the cab with M. Trévières by her side, and clapping her hands with all her might. Two recognitions, from which he hoped to draw some advantage as soon as he had got in the money he had won.

But of all the bookmakers Oxwall was the most furious, for Mowbridge's perfidy had ruined him. Just before the race, he had left that portion of the lawn on which he had been doing business, and had taken up a position from which he could see the race; and in a contrary manner he had passed through the same agonies of suspense as the Count had, and the blow fell all the heavier because up to the last moment he had believed that Mowbridge was acting in such a manner as would prevent his being accused of unfair riding. During the race, Malvina had joined him, and they were both in a terrible state of consternation at the unlooked-for result. "You are a nice one to confide a delicate bit of business to!" said Oxwall, "why, I had thought that you were a sharp girl, but you are as great a fool as the rest of them. You have let that Mowbridge walk into you nicely, and your infernal folly has lost me all I had in the world. I am half inclined to ask myself if you and he were not in the plot to swindle me. I saw you talk to him before the race. Surely he told you that he was going to throw me over, and yet you never came and gave me the slightest warning. At any rate you can give me back the ten thousand francs that I handed to you to buy that thief with."

"You know well enough that I haven't got them," returned Malvina, sharply. "I gave them to Mowbridge yesterday, and it is not my fault if you are in a hole. How could I guess that he would play me this trick? it is he that you ought to be mad with. This will teach you to do your dirty work yourself. I did not come to look for you: it was you who prayed and besought me to undertake the commission, and I did it as well as I could; and you have no right to say the things you do to me."

"If you are not satisfied you may go to the devil."

"I'll first go and have it out with Mowbridge. He has sold me, but I will make him repent it to the last day of his life. I will let it be known everywhere that he took money to lose the race. I will tell his employers so, and they will kick him out. I will shout it from the very house-tops."

"That won't give me back the ten thousand francs that he has had of mine, or the hundreds of thousands that I shall be obliged to shell out. I expect even now that the backers are looking for me, and some of them will say that I have made a bolt of it ; which is the best thing for me to do."

"Come, you are not so badly off as that."

"You think not ; well, you will see."

"Wait and be sure that Snowflake has won. A race is never sure until the number goes up, and there is none up yet."

"Yes," answered Oxwall, ironically. "I have a couple of minutes to the good yet, like the criminal has when he comes out of prison to go to the guillotine, and then I shall see No. 5, Snowflake's number, go up. He won by half a length, and it is impossible to lodge an objection."

"Well, no one can say what may happen ; they are in no hurry to put up their No. 5. See everyone is looking up—the bookmakers are all ready, but not one of them has yet paid, over Snowflake."

She was right, and the sight was a curious one. Each bookmaker was besieged by a dense crowd, holding their tickets in their hands, but no payments are ever made until the customary words "All right" have been given. Oxwall, who belonged to the aristocracy of the corporation of bookmakers, and who did his business in the inner enclosure, felt that an equally large crowd was waiting for his appearance, and that these were not men who were wanting only small sums from him. "I say," said Malvina, "look there ! it seems as if there was some kind of fuss going on. They are making signs from the top of the stand."

Her eyes had not deceived her : a man on the roof of one of the nearest stands was flourishing an umbrella as though making signs to some of the bookmakers below. Oxwall understood this code of signals that some of the bookmakers employ to ascertain the favourite in the ring before the race is run. For this they have two agents, one of whom listens to the heavy backers in the ring, and signals his news to the one on the roof, who transmits it to the bookmakers. There is an arranged code by which each number is shown by a certain gesture ; but after the race the layers do not receive their information from the same source : they pay a man whose sole duty consists of coming out of the ring and shout-

ing with the whole force of his lungs the words which announce that the race has been legitimately won, and that they can pay up. At this instant one of these men came running along at full speed, with his hands at the side of his mouth so as to form an impromptu speaking-trumpet. He was still at such a distance that they could not hear what he said, but Oxwall fancied that he could distinguish the fatal words "All right."

"It is all over," groaned he ; "I may as well blow out my brains."

"Wait a bit, old man," cried Malvina, who had sharper ears. "He isn't saying 'All right,' he is shouting 'Don't pay.'" And as a proof that she had heard correctly a formidable commotion began amongst the crowd, many of whom were seen shaking their fists at the bookmakers.

"Can it be possible?" muttered Oxwall, half suffocated with joy.

"Certain," cried Malvina ; "an objection has been lodged, they have found out Mowbridge in some devilment, and he is going to pay for it. Hurrah, Hurrah! How pleased I am."

"I must know what it is all about. I shall go into the enclosure. You may come with me if you like."

"Come with you? I should think I would," cried Mlle. Martingale.

It was easier to attempt to enter the weighing enclosure than to penetrate into it, for the news that an objection had been lodged against Snowflake had caused a violent rush from all sides. Everyone tried to get as near as possible to the spot where the judges were in debate, and the result was a terrible crush. But Oxwall had strong arms and a sturdy pair of shoulders, and he cleft his way through the crowd, dragging Malvina after him, who clung tightly to his coat, for she never hoped to be permitted to enter the enclosure which was closed to ladies of her position. She was in great glee, and her delight had almost turned her brain. She asked herself how Mowbridge had contrived to lose the race when he appeared to have won it, and what dishonest trick he had made use of, or whether after all it might not be some frivolous complaint brought forward by a discontented jockey.

She had forgotten a few words which would have cleared up the mystery. On leaving her he had said, "I know a means by which I can satisfy Oxwall without compromising myself." What means was this? Malvina did not care a bit as long as it debarred Snowflake from winning the race. But would it do so? This was a serious question which was already being discussed by the stewards, and it was evidently

not settled, as no number had yet gone up. Oxwall and Malvina were still struggling to cross the course, when an immense shout rose up and told them that judgment had been given, and they saw "No. 9" go up—the number of Cash-on-Delivery. This time it was an official declaration, and there was no mistake. The horse which had come in second was proclaimed the winner. This was all that the bookmaker and the friend of the jockey required. Their day's work was complete.

"I knew that my John would keep his word," exclaimed Malvina.

"Come to me after the last race," said Oxwall, quickly, "and I will give you your ten thousand francs."

"And the fifteen thousand for our worthy friend Mowbridge?"

"Yes, if he can prove that he lost the race on purpose," muttered the bookmaker between his teeth; then leaving Mlle. Martingale where she was, he hastened away to where a crowd of impatient sporting men were awaiting him.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

CHECKMATE TO MASTER AND MAN

WHAT was passing in the enclosure whilst there was so much anxiety on the lawn? There was no difficulty in learning this. Snowflake had returned to the weighing-house ridden by Mowbridge and guarded by Saint Senier. Sartilly had joined them, and was being congratulated by the very persons who a short time before had cursed and abused him. There was nothing more to do except for the jockey to go to the scale. This operation is usually a mere formality, for it rarely occurs that the scales do not record the same weight as they did before the race. Sometimes, however, an accident happens, and instances have been known of an unfortunate jockey losing a race from having dropped a stirrup-iron. Mowbridge had not done anything like this, but when he was weighed it was found that he was two pounds under weight. It was easy to discover how this had happened, for one of the weights had dropped out during the race. Mowbridge asserted that it had fallen out without his perceiving

it, and pointed out that the species of pocket in the saddle cloth for holding the extra weight had not been properly fastened. On examination this fact was proved, but a decision was at once given to which no one dared to object, not even the owners of the horse.

It was an extraordinary scene. Saint Senier was in a state of consternation; Gontran perfectly crushed; Mowbridge had put on a most melancholy expression of face; whilst those who had backed the horse were either swearing or lamenting. No one as yet dared accuse the jockey of having played this trick in obedience to his masters' orders, or rather one of his masters, for no one for a moment suspected Saint Senier. But every loser had the same thought in his mind, and afar off could be heard the growling of the storm which was soon to burst forth with terrible violence. One man who had backed the horse for a small amount requested to make a statement to the stewards, and deposed that at the moment when Mowbridge allowed Cash-on-Delivery to pass him at the incline he saw him bend down and place his hand on the saddle cloth. Several others corroborated this, saying that they too had witnessed this suspicious movement, and had Alfred de Mussidan chosen to come forward he could have said the same, for he had mentioned the incident whilst he was describing the race to those around him. But for the moment there was no question of going into Mowbridge's conduct; for had the offence been brought home to him, in order to inflict the penalty which the rules of the Jockey Club have ordered for jockeys guilty of fraud or dishonest riding, a strict inquiry would have had to be instituted, and for the moment the duty of the stewards was simply to order Cash-on-Delivery's number to be hoisted as winner of the Produce Stakes.

After this order had been given Mowbridge slunk off, as much to avoid the reproaches of his masters as to hide himself from the wrath of the losers, who would willingly have torn him to pieces on the spot.

Sartilly and Saint Senier stood looking at each other, and the more miserable of the two was not Saint Senier, though a heavy blow had been dealt him. He had lost a very large sum of money, but still he could meet his losses, whilst Sartilly was utterly ruined as well as being dishonoured, for he was now openly accused of having planned the defeat of his own horse. His friends, if he had any left, shrank away from him, and even Mussidan, who had countenanced him up to the very last, did not care now to be seen with a man who was so terribly compromised. No one but Sartilly himself could fathom the abyss into which the treachery of

the villainous Mowbridge had hurled him, for he alone knew the position in which he stood with his father-in-law, who could crush him at once by denouncing him as a perjurer, a forger, and a poisoner. Sartilly had also placed himself beyond the pale by not fulfilling the engagements into which he had entered with M. Vacheron, and could not release himself from the fearful predicament into which his own criminal acts forced him, and he could see no other exit but that of self-destruction.

But he had not yet done all the evil that he wished ; and before dying he wanted to revenge himself on all those that he hated, on George Cézambre, on Trévières, on Valentine, and the old contractor, and thus to make victims of those who had so often united to save him. He left the weighing enclosure without taking any notice of his partner, who made no attempts to detain him, and sought to gain the lawn, where he hoped to be able to find the cab in which his wife had come to the race. As he passed through the crowd he was overwhelmed with the most cruel insults, more cruel than actual manual violence. The members of his club shrank back from him as though he had been smitten with the plague, whilst hundreds of voices sang in his ears the famous chorus from *La Favorita*, "Alone he remains—with dishonour." And this was but the commencement of the troubles that beset his path. In front of the grand stand he met Mme. de Saint Senier, who, wonderful to relate, was looking for her husband. Misfortune attracted this evil-minded woman as carrion draws the vultures together. She was in haste to glut her eyes with the sight of the victims, and as Sartilly was the first that she came across, so was he the first to receive a volley of insolence from her.

"Well," cried she, loud enough to attract the attention of the bystanders, "so we are shamefully beaten. Your jockey has done his part, unless indeed it was your stable boy. I know now why the little villain would not let me come near his horse. I suppose he was just going to poison it, yet the poison could not have been of very excellent quality, since Snowflake came in first in spite of it, but Mowbridge chucked away his weight all over the course, and so the race was lost. How much did you make by the robbery?"

"Madame!"

"Oh! don't be in a rage. Everybody knows now that you laid against your own horse. I expect that my husband will be angered. Will you bring me some news this evening of your beautiful Diana?"

A crowd had by this time begun to collect, but the Viscountess seemed in no haste to finish her tirade.

Sartilly, by dint of pushing, forced his way through the ring around him, but could not escape the last shaft that she hurled after him.

"By the way," cried she, "your wife is over there in a cab with her beloved M. Trévières. Make haste if you want to see her. The coachman is on the box, and has the reins in his hands."

Sartilly escaped from the lady's objurgations by throwing himself into the crowd, which the police were now beginning to drive back in order to clear the course, and as soon as he had gained the lawn he turned his steps towards the line of carriages ranged by the side of the ropes, seeking to find the spot at which he had caught sight of the cab.

A cab which had just drawn out of the line came towards him; he stepped on one side to avoid it. Valentine's head appeared at the window. She caught sight of her husband and at once drew it hastily in, and sank back into her seat by the side of her former betrothed Henri Trévières. The coachman whipped up his horse, and the vehicle drove off, carrying with it the last hopes of Gontran de Sartilly.

Gontran had yet cherished the hope of once again reconquering his wife's affection: it was the only chance that remained to him, and he had made up his mind to play his last card by going up and speaking to Valentine without exactly knowing what means he should adopt to enter again into her good graces. Should he seek another quarrel with Trévières, pleading as his excuse a fit of jealousy? Should he assume the air of a heart-broken man, who has come to plead for pardon. He had made no settled plan, but had hoped to be inspired by circumstances, for he never doubted but that he still preserved his ascendancy over his victim.

But all his hopes of a reconciliation passed away with the cab, as it rolled off the course. Valentine had grown pale as she recognised her husband, but she had looked coldly on him, and in her features he could read the expression of a feeling more imperishable than hate—that of utter contempt.

It was all over. The ruined Count had nothing further to expect from the weakness of his wife. He must give up all hope of softening her heart, or of seeking for her pity over a ruin which she would not perhaps believe. He thought that she had attended the race to convince herself that the reports that were flying about had no foundation; they must have come to her ears, and she had wished to know if the man she had loved so fondly in by-gone days, had descended so low as to plot with jockeys and bookmakers to rob his friends. She had applauded with all her heart when his horse had come in first, and at that moment Gontran, rehabilitated

by Snowflake's victory, might once more have touched her heart. But now it was too late. The news of the fraud having been discovered, and of its prompt punishment by the winner being disqualified, had spread like lightning over the course and M. Trévières had doubtless told Valentine all, and she, when she heard the news of his dishonour, had condemned him without a thought of further pity.

This was the first time that he had borne the punishment of a sin which he had not committed, since he had changed his mind at the last moment. It was true that he had intended to do so, and that if the intention makes the crime, he was in this case morally guilty. But he had to make up his mind at once as to his future mode of action. His wife had escaped him, but all was not lost for all that. He could no longer live in Paris with a blighted reputation, and hunted down by his creditors; but with an income of three hundred thousand francs, a man can live well anywhere. There was nothing to prevent him carrying out his agreement with M. Vacheron, and leave for England the next morning.

The only thing that he now regretted was having carried off Mlle. de Ganges. Before his misfortunes he congratulated himself on having done so, but now he felt that she would be terribly in his way, the more so that she was not at present in a fit state to follow him to London, where he was anxious to proceed at once so as to draw the first quarter of the allowance that his father-in-law had engaged to pay him; and he had no scruples in abandoning her, unless indeed when her health was restored she agreed to cross the Channel in order to join him. Just at present he did not care about seeing her again. Dr. Pontier was there to look after her; he could easily wait for news of her until the next day, and he did not wish to see anyone until he had come to some really definite conclusion as to his future movements, and he had therefore half a mind to go and sleep at Versailles or Saint Germain, so as to avoid all unpleasant meetings. It was easy enough to do this. He had only to walk to the nearest station of the Central Railway, and change at the Saint Lazare Terminus. He carried out his project, and crossed the course without meeting George Cézambre, who as Mme. de Saint Senier had told him, was wandering about the place looking, not for Sartilly, but for his lost Diana. George could think of nothing but his mistress who had disappeared so strangely, and he had hoped to come across her at Longchamps; for he did not for a moment guess that whilst he was looking into every carriage hoping to see her, she, poor girl, was lying with a fractured skull in the very chamber where she had formerly dressed George's wound. He

had paid no attention to the racing and was utterly ignorant of Snowflake's disqualification. What cared he which horse had lost or won. All he wanted was an explanation with the faithless girl who had left him, and had he encountered his hated rival, he would have been unable to resist the temptation of insulting him, and insisting on an immediate meeting. It was however doubtless written that he should not fight with Gontran de Sartilly, nor did he even perceive the Countess who was hidden away in a cab. But whilst he was wandering about amongst the vehicles, he suddenly found himself face to face with Lisa, who had been seeking him for over an hour. After her short conversation with Gontran through the railings, she had kept about the neighbourhood of the house, watching for Francis who had seen her, and who would doubtless come in search of her as soon as his master had gone away. But the valet did not make his appearance, and Lisa, after having spent all the morning waiting for him, had decided at twelve o'clock to return to Auteuil. She had learned enough to give some information to Mlle. de Ganges' lover and she hoped to find him at the villa, to which he had not yet returned when she had left on her morning's voyage of discovery; but she only found Domingo, whom George had sent home after his altercation with Gontran, and who told the maid, that his master had gone to the racecourse. Domingo also told her all that had taken place at the Madrid, and so the intelligent girl had set off for Longchamps, where she hoped to find M. Cézambre. She had reached the course at two o'clock, and had sought for him everywhere, and was about to give up the search in despair, when she met him.

"Ah! sir," said she, "if you only knew——"

"I know all," interrupted George. "She followed that man, who took her to his house: I had fancied that he would have brought her here, and that is why I came."

"To the races? Why, Mademoiselle is ill, and I believe dangerously hurt."

"Have you seen her?"

"No, the Count has forbidden anyone to enter her room."

"Who told you this?"

"No one. I could not get hold of Francis, the Count's valet, or I would have made him speak, but I caught a glimpse of Dr. Pontier leaving. He was the Countess's doctor, and they would not have called him in if one of the servants had been ill, so I am sure that he came to see Mademoiselle."

"Yes, I understand all now,—she had a fall from her horse."

"Domingo, who brought the horse back to the villa, told

me the same. Mademoiselle must have fallen, and the Count who was passing by picked her up, and carried her off to his house. She must have been unconscious, or she would have never consented to have followed him."

"And the scoundrel carried her off. How was it that I did not guess it all sooner. I was sure that he was an insolent liar, when I spoke to him this morning at the Madrid. He asserted that Mlle. de Ganges had asked him to take her away—and I believed him. I have cursed her, and have been seeking for her in order to reproach her with her treachery—but there is yet time to save her from that man. Come with me ; we will go to his house at once."

"You will not get in, his servants have orders to let no one pass."

"What do I care ? I will call on the police for aid. I will go in in spite of anybody. M. de Sartilly has no right to kidnap a woman."

"He will deny that he has done so ; he will swear that Mademoiselle came there of her own free will and accord, and he will say that you are acting from motives of jealousy. The police will not dare to search the house ; but there is the doctor who lives close by, and can give you full information about her, though I fear he will say nothing, for he is devoted to the Count heart and soul."

"I want to see Diana, and I will see her. Don't come with me if you are afraid."

"Afraid ! not I, but I have a means of getting to Mademoiselle without running any risk."

"How do you mean ?"

"I have still the key of the private door, the one that opens in the Rue Villejust ; but I dare not make use of it during the daytime, because all the servants are about, and we should never get to Mademoiselle's room—I say we, because I hope that you will come with me. But to-night when all are in bed, we will cross the garden, and go up by the little staircase in the left wing—you know it. Then we will knock at her door, and she will open it."

"If she is able to do so ; if she is not too closely watched."

"And if she is, those in charge of her will do so, and surely they cannot prevent our entering."

"I only wish that it was the Count. I long to find myself face to face with him."

"I am sure that he will not be there ; indeed I should be much surprised if he returned home at all to-night, after the terrible scrape that he has got into."

"What scrape ?"

"What, have you not heard that he is accused of entering

into a plot to make his horse lose the race ; that there was quite a disturbance on the course, and he went off without beat of drum, or they would have torn him to pieces."

"A racing swindle !" muttered George, who had not forgotten the conversation that he had overheard at the Pavillon d' Armenonville.

"If you doubt me," returned Lisa, "just take a turn round the course, and listen to what they say. You will probably meet M. de Saint Senier who will tell you all about it. M. de Sartilly's reputation is lost, everyone is agreed on that ; his friends have turned their backs on him, and in my opinion he will be unable to remain in Paris. It is true that he may have made a great deal of money by this fraudulent transaction, but he will not succeed in taking away Mlle. de Ganges with him, for she will never consent to follow a thief, and if she has not heard that he has robbed right and left, I will be the person to tell her of it."

"Very well," returned George Cézambre, "I will adopt your plan. We will go to Sartilly's house together. What time shall we go ?"

"I do not think that we ought to go before midnight. The later we get there the better chance we shall have of succeeding. I will wager that the Count will not be there, and the servants will not keep watch until two o'clock in the morning. We will therefore meet in the Rue de Villejust at half-past two."

"I will be there."

"Will you permit me to bring Domingo with me, he may be useful."

"Certainly, let him come."

"Very well then, that is settled. If you have no need of me here, I will go to M. Vacheron's in the Rue de la Neva, for I want to let the Countess know how her husband has behaved."

"Yes, tell her that he has covered himself with shame and dishonour, and that he has carried off Mlle. de Ganges."

"I will not fail to do so, for I wish to cure her of all love for him ; to remove her from the influence of this villain. But let us first save Mademoiselle. After my visit to the Countess, I will return to Auteuil and tell Domingo what he has to do, and both he and I will be at the meeting-place at half-past two. Will you not come back to Auteuil, sir, for dinner ?"

"No, no ; go off and do what you want," answered George, shortly, who had something else to think of besides his dinner.

As soon as George Cézambre could make his way through

the crowd, he went direct to the weighing enclosure. He found but few men there; those who had dropped their money over Snowflake had gone, and Saint Senier himself was nowhere to be seen. Alfred de Mussidan however was there, and he at once came up to George.

"Well," asked he, "Are you hard hit too? I am in for twenty thousand francs."

"Did you back M. de Sartilly's horse?"

"Unfortunately I did so, and poor Gontran is worse off even than I am. He has lost an enormous sum of money."

"People say it is just the other way, and that he has won heavily."

"You mean that he laid against his own horse? Well, for my part, I don't like to believe it until it is clearly proved. However, we shall learn the whole truth when the jockey is examined. But pray excuse me, I must leave you now, for I picked up two hundred louis in the last race, and, as you may imagine, I am anxious to get them."

With these words Mussidan turned away from George, who was left hardly better informed than he had been before, and so moved off to the part occupied by the bookmakers; not that he was acquainted with them, but in the hopes of picking up some stray scraps of conversation which might be useful to him. There, however, they were commencing to strike their tents, the few or unimportant bets in the last race had nearly all been settled, and the bookmakers were conversing with each other concerning the incident of the day. On one point they were all agreed, and that was in Mowbridge's having dropped his weight on purpose. Some asserted that the Count de Sartilly was not a sharer in the fraud, since the defeat of his horse had utterly ruined him. Others accused him openly, and certainly William Oxwall was not amongst those who defended him. George knew him by sight, as he had done business with him three weeks before through M. de Saint Senier's introduction, and had won twenty thousand francs from him by backing Black Radish. Saint Senier had told him that Oxwall was one of the richest and most respected of the bookmakers on the turf, and he was loud in his condemnation of Sartilly's conduct. George therefore doubted no longer, the less so when he recollected a certain conversation which he had overheard at the Pavillon d'Armenonville. Nothing, therefore, was left for him but to await patiently the time appointed for his meeting with Lisa. Worthily Mr. Oxwall was in the seventh heaven of delight. At one stroke he had doubled his already large fortune,

and had got three quarters of his debts in. The few remaining backers of Snowflake who still owed him money were all solvent, so that he had nothing to do but to pass the evening of a well-spent day in merriment and revelry. He left his books and papers with his clerk, and quitted the enclosure with his bag full of money and his pocket-book crammed to bursting with bank notes. His carriage, a neat victoria which he hired every Sunday, was waiting for him behind the stand, and he hastened to it so as to convey his money to a safe place of deposit. About fifty paces from the stables he was pounced upon by Malvina, whom he had almost forgotten, but who on her part remembered well enough that she had twenty-five thousand francs to receive, of which fifteen thousand were for Mowbridge. He made no effort to avoid her, though a thought had struck him which he for the time kept in the background.

"Well," said she, accosting him with a smile, "and so the Produce Stakes have been lost and won."

"Not lost for all of us though," returned Oxwall.

"No, no, we know on which side our bread is buttered, eh, Father Two-to-one-bar-one?"

"I am quite satisfied."

"I can easily believe you. But—well, I won't brag;—but it is to me that you owe it all; yes, all those pretty bank notes that you carry next your heart—why, there is a regular swelling under your coat. For had I not got hold of Mowbridge at the last, he would have thrown us over to a certainty."

"I know that you helped me very much, and so I am going to pay you the ten thousand francs that I promised you."

"And the fifteen thousand for Mowbridge. You know that I have to take them to him at six o'clock."

"Ah! that is quite different. Mowbridge has no claim on me; he has had more than he has earned."

"He has had ten thousand francs, and he is waiting for the balance that was promised him."

"Then he will have to wait a very long time. I would have paid him if he had earned his money, but there is nothing to prove that he has done so. He made a capital race of it and brought his horse first past the post, and I certainly shan't pay him for having done exactly what I told him not to do."

"How about the weight he dropped?"

"He has asserted before five hundred witnesses that it was an accident."

"I should think so; why, if he had confessed it he would have been disqualified from riding for ever."

"And so he will be now."

"Then you allow that he has some claim for damages?"

"I don't know if he has any claim, but I am not going to pay it."

"Take care, my dear sir; he will certainly try to be revenged on you, and he will repeat all over the shop the offer that was made to him."

"I defy him to prove that it came from me. Everyone believes that it was Sartilly who bribed him."

"But Sartilly has been ruined by his horse having lost."

"That is not certain. He has lost something to me, but he may have backed Cash-on-Delivery with other bookmakers. Now don't say any more, my girl, for it will be of no use. Mowbridge shan't have a halfpenny from me, whilst you are going to take your com."

"I don't ask anything better than that. But you can't think how I hate going to meet a fellow who has compromised himself for nothing."

"Nothing compels you to do so."

"He is waiting to take me to dinner; and to tell you the truth, I thought to get off my engagement by greasing his palm with your money; but now—well, I shall have to make a sacrifice, I suppose, to console him, so that it is I, who have been let in more than any one."

"How stupid you are," said Oxwall, with a smile. "Where do you say he was to meet you?"

"In the Champs Elysées, by the Rotunda of the Panorama."

"Well, let him wait there; and come and dine with me at the Café Deraud, close to the Madeleine. I will give you the flimseys at dessert—and if you are very nice —"

"Yes, if I am very nice?"

"Why, I'll put another one on the top of them."

Malvina affected to pause for the sake of appearances, but at last she flung her arms round the bookmaker's neck, exclaiming, "My own William, you are a darling; let Mowbridge go to the devil." Malvina Martingale is not the girl for a monkey like him." And in a moment afterwards the bookmaker and the lady were rolling towards Paris in the victoria.

This well-assorted couple were perfectly happy together, and would doubtless enjoy themselves; but there was weeping at M. Vacheron's, and a melancholy drama was being performed at the house in Avenue d'Eylau.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE FORTUNE-TELLER OF MONTMARTRE

GONTRAN DE SARTILLY had fled to hide his disgrace at Saint Germain, and had secured a bed at the Henry IV Pavillon.

George Cézambre, in the deepest grief, was walking about Paris, until the time for his appointment with Lisa. The great city appeared to him nothing but a desert now that he had lost Diana, and he walked through the streets without seeing or hearing what was going on around him. He no longer heaped curses on Mlle. de Ganges, for he believed in her innocence ; and yet he could not help feeling that she was lost to him for ever ; not that he would for a moment have refused to receive her back, but fond lovers are sometimes endowed with the gift of second sight, and he could foresee some impending misfortune. George had formed no plans, he could make none, since he was still only endeavouring to guess at the doings of his worst enemy, but one idea had taken firm root in his brain, and that was that he would kill this man either in a duel, or by some other means.

Sartilly was a man of courage, and though at the Madrid he had refused to accept George's challenge at once, he had yet said, "Send your friends to me on Tuesday or Wednesday and you will find me ready," and this expression of opinion he had supported by plausible reasoning. The delay was but a short one, since Sunday was already drawing to a close, but yet he found it much too long ; however he had resigned himself to forty-eight hours' delay, but trusted to chance to bring about a quicker conclusion.

If the Count should happen to surprise George in his house there would doubtless be a violent quarrel, and if George struck him, then the affair could be settled on the spot ; and the young creole dreamed of a duel, the details of which would be suddenly arranged, an encounter without witnesses, in some sequestered corner of the park, with no light save the stars that studded the vault of the heavens ; and yet he never thought how unfortunate those grounds had been to him, for had he not fallen in them, struck by a bullet discharged from a servant's pistol. If, however, the Count, less reckless than his young antagonist supposed him to be, would

not consent to this proposal, then George had made up his mind to blow out his adversary's brains, and to kill himself afterwards.

With these mad thoughts traversing his mind, George walked on without taking any heed of where he was going, and all of a sudden he became aware that he had lost himself. After traversing the outer boulevards, he had turned to the left, and ascending several hilly streets, he at last arrived on the heights of Montmartre. He had never been in this quarter of the city before, and when he saw the enormous city of Paris stretched out at his feet like a vast sea, filled with houses instead of rocks, he could not help regretting his native island, where the earlier years of his youth had flitted peacefully away. Since he had set foot in this mighty metropolis, so ardently longed for by those who have never lived there, he had loved, and suffered deeply ; but his peace of mind and his heart's repose he had left behind him in Mauritius ; and at the moment he would have blessed the fairy who, by a flourish of her magic wand, could have transported him to the place of his birth. But the times have past when fairies used to come to the aid of hapless lovers, and he could only look to himself to save Diana, always supposing that Diana would consent to be saved. He advanced to the edge of the descent, on the southern side of the hill, and contemplated the picture which lay stretched out beneath his feet. The night was closing in, and here and there jets of gas began to sparkle in the darkening mass of buildings. But George was in no hurry to descend again into the seething cauldron ; he had many hours to spend before he was to meet Lisa and Domingo, in the Rue Villejust, and it suited him just as well to pass them in this spot, far from man and the tumult of the city. He did not feel hungry, but, as he said to himself, "Should I do so, I could easily find some place in the neighbourhood where I could get something to eat." As this idea passed through his mind, a voice, which made him start, murmured just behind him, "Paris is beautiful by twilight, is it not ?" He turned round sharply and perceived a woman, who he was at first tempted to take for the Witch of the Heights, so strangely was she attired. A species of Arab burnouse shrouded her from head to foot, and concealed every feature save a pair of startling eyes. Was she a mad woman, a mendicant, or an adventuress. Being unable to decide this question, George made no reply, and prepared to quit a place where he was liable to meet with such perplexing personages. "The view from here," continued the strange woman, "is finer than that from the Villa des Primevères."

In utter amazement George looked at her, as though

seeking to find out who she was. "It is useless," replied she, as though guessing his intention. "You do not know me, but I know you very well."

"Where did you know me?"

"Ah, where indeed! I know a little of everyone. I can read your fortune by the cards, and to do that one must be well-informed. I live close here, and if you will come with me I will tell you things that you would be only too happy to know."

"I thank you, but I do not care to dip into the future."

"I will only speak to you then of the past, and the present—oh! do not mistake—not of yours, but of the women in whom you are interested."

"Tell me their names," cried George, eagerly.

"I will not utter them here. I do not work in the open air like the mountebanks of the fairs."

"Well, I, on my part, will not go to your house, unless you speak more openly."

The veiled woman reflected for a moment. "I am willing to mention the name of one of them," said she, lowering her voice. "One is called Valentine. This ought to put you on the right track. Will you come with me now?"

George was in that frame of mind that recoils before nothing. "First tell me," said he, "why you are in this spot. You could not have known that I should come here, for I did not know it myself, and chance only brought me."

"Chance often arranges things for the best. I did not come here to seek you. Every evening I come to take a walk here, and it is fortunate, both for you and for others, that I met you here to-night. Fear nothing, and follow me."

"Not before you tell me what intent you have in seeing myself and others, as you say."

"That is very simple. I do not intend to serve you for nothing, and you shall pay me for the information and the advice which I shall give you. I could make my bargain beforehand, but I will trust to your generosity. I am sure that I shall not be a loser by so doing, for you will not consider that you can pay too much for information which may save a woman's life."

George fancied that this mysterious woman alluded to the dangers which threatened Mlle. de Ganges, and he hesitated no longer. "Good," said he, "I will follow you: but let me warn you, I am armed."

"Be easy, sir, I do not wish to lead you into a trap. I live alone in the little house to which I am about to take you, and during the time that you are there you will be in greater security than you are in your villa at Auteuil."

"Very well, show me the way."

The fortune teller at once struck into a path that led round the hill, turned up a little ill-paved street, and stopped before a strangely-constructed building, which seemed to have fallen from the skies on to its present site. "We have arrived," said she, drawing from beneath her burnouse a large key. The place where they were standing was perfectly lonely, and a murder might have been committed there without the possibility of interference; for the nearest houses were some thirty feet away, and the tops of their roofs only just reached the platform on which the strange abode of the pretended sorceress stood. The hut was more like a pigeon house than a habitation for human beings. It was of a round shape, and seemed to be falling to ruin.

But the questionable appearance of the place did not intimidate George, who was now resolved to see the adventure through to the end.

Whilst the woman took the key from her pocket, he drew his revolver, and prepared to fire at the first suspicious movement of the woman who had lured him here.

She noticed his preparations, and said coldly, "Have no fear, sir, and do not judge of my house by its humble exterior. You shall now see the inside of it. It has not quite the appearance of a murderer's den, and you will soon be convinced that no one has been killed here. Indeed, it has been used for a totally different purpose." As she spoke she opened the door noiselessly and they entered into a little hall, lighted by an Arab lantern of exquisite workmanship, which hung from the ceiling. "Do not be alarmed," continued she ironically, "if I close the door: it is merely to prevent anyone coming in to disturb us; not that I expect anyone, but this part is full of drunkards and bad characters, who might take it into their heads to intrude on us. Have the kindness to go upstairs, my consulting-room is on the first floor." She led the way up a staircase hung with antique tapestry, and George, who had followed her closely, came into a kind of boudoir, the walls of which were covered with silk; it was furnished in Oriental fashion with divans, low chairs, and tables inlaid with mother-of-pearl. One might have fancied oneself in the harem of some Eastern prince, had not a modern lamp been standing on a lacquered stand in a corner. After a short pause the woman threw aside her veil and exhibited a countenance worn and withered by some forty years of continual dissipation.

"You have never seen me before?" she said, looking him steadily in the face.

"Never," answered he, "and now I want to know where I am?"

"You are in Gontran de Sartilly's secret abode."

"Then you have led me into a trap by his orders."

"I have done nothing of the kind. It is fully three months since Sartilly set foot here, and he does not even guess that you are here now."

"Enough of these riddles—answer me plainly what you want with me, and why you have brought me here?"

"I am about to tell you, only my recital will be a long one. You can remain standing if you are afraid of being taken at a disadvantage, but permit me to sit down. My walk has tired me."

She sat down as she spoke, and George, in more perplexity than ever, folded his arms, and waited for her to speak.

"You do not know me," she said, "but the Countess Valentine is well acquainted with me, for it is not long since I was her maid. Mlle. de Ganges must have spoken of me to you, my name is Florence ——"

George had forgotten the name of this vile creature, but his memory returned to him in a moment. "Why," cried he, "it was you that tried to poison Mme. de Sartilly. Do you dare ——?"

"I dare to tell you that the Count ordered me to poison his wife," answered the terrible woman, without flinching, "but I took care not to obey him. I have not many scruples, but I don't gain my bread by such means. I see that you have heard all the story of the glass of water. Well, I assure you that the Countess might have drank all of it without running the least risk. For I had put in no prussic acid, but a few drops of a harmless essence. You do not believe this."

"I do not."

"Perhaps you will believe me when I tell you my life. Listen to me, and you will soon understand why I hate Sartilly, after having been his tool for so long. You see me now? Well—I was his mistress. It is fifteen years since then, and I have had ample time to grow old and ugly. When he grew tired of me he offered to make me his agent to younger and prettier women than myself. I accepted his offer. You see I am open. I was the slave of his pleasures before his marriage, and his go-between afterwards. It was a shameful position, and I can see that you despise me, but permit me to finish my story."

"Make it as short as you can," returned George, who felt a feeling of loathing rising within him.

"I was put in charge of this place where he used to meet

his mistresses during his disagreements with the Countess. Then the idea struck him to employ me as her maid when he had discharged Lisa. He promised me a heavy sum if I would free him from his wife, and I allowed him to believe that I would comply with his wishes ; and now I tell you that I only made a pretence of obeying him, but he believed that I had made use of the poison with which he had supplied me, and as my reward he turned me out of the house the day after the Countess fled, and told me to come here. For the last fortnight he has omitted to pay me the hush money that he promised me if I would not denounce him. I have been silent without payment long enough, and I will no longer show him any consideration, for I expect nothing more from him as he is utterly ruined. I was trying to invent some scheme of revenge when I met you."

"Where had you seen me before?"

"Driving with Mlle. de Ganges, whom I know by sight from having seen her with the Countess. You went down the Avenue d'Eylau, and the servants told me that you were her lover. I have a good memory for faces—yes, I have a good memory for many things, especially for injuries that have been done me, and I hate Sartilly with an undying hatred, for having left me to die of hunger after having tempted me to aid him in a plot, by which I risked twenty years' penal servitude, if not worse."

"Are you mad enough to think that I am going to mix myself up in your affairs, and serve as the instrument of your vengeance?"

"It is not a question of that ; what I want is to prevent Sartilly from attempting once more to strike the blow which he has once failed to do, and which he will succeed in this time if I do not hinder him."

"I do not understand you."

"You will do so in a moment. When Sartilly wished to poison his wife, it was not only to get rid of her, but to become her heir ; he had induced her to make her will, which he has in his possession, for he has shown it to me."

"She must have cancelled it since she has been living with her father."

"Sartilly does not believe that she has done so, and he knows the poor lady only too well, and he trusts to the mad passion she has for him. Indeed, it seems as if he had bewitched her. But that is not all. He made her sign and copy a declaration, of which he wrote the original for her, a declaration in which she confesses having committed suicide. Had she died on the night on which she fled, this paper would have been found on her writing-table. I have seen it, and I tell you that one of these days he will make use of it."

"How can he use it?"

"He will manage to induce his wife to meet him privately. She is quite weak enough to grant him this. When once he is alone with her, he will stab her to the heart, and place the declaration by the side of the body. Everyone will believe in her having committed suicide. Sartilly will produce the will, and inherit two or three million. It is all very easy."

"If I were certain that you were not deceiving me——"

"You would warn the Countess, eh? Well, she is at her father's house. The Rue de la Neva is not situated in China, and cabs were built for men and not for dogs. Drive there without the loss of a minute. I cannot prove to you that I am speaking the truth, but what do you risk in warning the father and daughter? They will then take precautions, and even if such steps should be useless, you will not the less have rendered them an immense service."

George could not help feeling that this depraved woman was right in what she said, but he could not understand why she had so suddenly experienced a relapse to a better frame of mind, boasting as she almost had done of her infamous career. "This, sir," continued she, "is the information for which I desire to be paid. No, no, not now, since you have doubts of the truth of my statement. You shall pay me after having seen old Father Vacheron, and the Countess; and when you are convinced that she has foolishly signed her death warrant, and that her husband is only waiting for an opportunity to execute it, then we will talk about payment."

George felt inclined to follow this advice, but it struck him that Florence's confession was incomplete. "You have as yet said nothing of Mlle. de Ganges," said he.

"Mlle. de Ganges!" repeated Florence, "Oh! she is in no danger; at least her life is not threatened."

The natural way in which Florence spoke convinced George that she had not heard of the accident that had happened to Diana the evening before, and this was not to be wondered at as she had not seen Sartilly for some days. "You told me when first we met," resumed George, "that you were going to speak to me of two women. You have told me about the Countess; now what have you to say of Mlle. de Ganges?"

"That Sartilly has sworn that she shall be his, by fair means or foul. He has never forgiven her for rejecting his advances, when she lived in the same house with him, or for having assisted his wife to escape; and as he has no great love for you, he would be delighted to take your mistress from you. To do this he will hesitate at nothing, and I advise you to watch over her well, and this last bit of counsel I throw in gratis. Keep guard over your fair friend, and do not permit her to go about alone."

Had George received this piece of advice earlier he could certainly have followed it, and the helpless Diana would not have fallen into the villainous Sartilly's clutches ; but the warning had come too late, and for the past twenty-four hours, Diana had been at her enemy's mercy. Florence could be of no assistance in favouring her escape, and George had not sufficient confidence in her to ask her to help him.

"You know now all that I had to tell you," added she. "Assure yourself that I have told you the truth, and after that think of me. I throw myself on your generosity."

Florence had no hesitation in asking that her services should be paid for, but George was not offended at this open appeal to his purse, for he had no desire to evade paying the woman for revealing to him the vile machinations of the Count. He even thought that it might be best to pay her at once, so as to prevent her betraying him, as she had betrayed Sartilly.

On returning to the villa after the night he had passed at the Madrid, he had locked up a portion of the money he had gained at the club ; but in order to be prepared for unforeseen events, he had left in his portfolio some thousand franc notes. He took out three and threw them into her lap so as to avoid any contact with so infamous a woman, and said briefly : "Here is something on account. If you have told the truth I will go even further than this."

"And so will I," returned Florence, pocketing the notes. "You are now in a position to defend both the Countess and Mlle. de Ganges, but you will have a rough game to play with Sartilly, for it is difficult to put your foot on a man of his stamp. If you are compelled to come to the last extremity with him, play the card of denouncing him to the law. Summon me as a witness, and I will speak—and tell all that I know—or better still, begin by having me arrested, for I shall get clear, as there is no positive evidence against me ; not so that villain, who will be driven back to the wall. The law will work for us, and when he sees that it is all up with him, he will simply kill himself, and I do not know a conclusion that would be more satisfactory to all parties."

"Where shall we find you again ?"

"Here. I shall not budge until I see you again ; but do not lose a minute in warning the Countess, for I know of what Sartilly is capable. He won't have time to have done anything to-day, as he had a horse entered at Longchamps, but believe me that he will try something to-morrow."

Her assertion had the more probability in it from the fact of Snowflake's defeat, which had driven Gontran to take immediate action ; and George, who perceived this, determined to act at once. "I shall go to M. Vacheron immediately," said he. "Show me the shortest way."

"Come with me," returned Florence, rising. "I will take you to the Rue Fonterelle, from there you can get on to the Boulevard Rochechouart, where you will find a cabstand."

She kept her word, and after a drive of twenty-five minutes George found himself at M. Vacheron's door. As soon as he rang the old servant opened the door, and the intelligent face of Lisa could be discerned peeping over his shoulder. M. Vacheron had told her to get her dinner in the kitchen, and she had hurried out at the sound of the bell.

"Ah ! sir," said she, "how pleased her ladyship will be to see you, and so will M. Vacheron, and M. Trévières, they were speaking about you just now ;" and before the old-fashioned servant of the ex-contractor could say a word, she threw open the door, and in a clear and distinct voice announced "M. George Cézambre !" George heard exclamations of surprise, and the sound of chairs being pushed back, as all rose from the table to welcome him. On any other occasion George would have felt a little embarrassed, for he was but slightly acquainted with any of them. He had hardly exchanged a word with M. Trévières on the day when that gentleman had come to the villa, and he had only seen M. Vacheron on that when he and Diana had so nearly driven over him ; and his knowledge of the Countess had only arisen from that memorable night in February which was nearly having no to-morrow for him. But if he did not know much of them, they had heard a great deal of him ; for mixed up as he had been in all recent events, hardly a day had passed without the name of George Cézambre being pronounced in the house in the Rue de la Neva. Both father and daughter made him feel at once that they looked on him as a trusty friend ; their hands were extended to grasp his, nor was Trévières' greeting less cordial. Vacheron made a point of his sitting down, and though dinner was over, insisted on having it brought up again for him.

"Lisa has told all," said Valentine. "It is too dreadful. Poor Diana ?"

The voice of the Countess quivered, and her father hurled a string of imprecations against Sartilly, swearing by all his gods, that he would not leave Mlle. de Ganges in the clutches of such a scoundrel, and that after dinner he would go for a Commissary of Police to accompany him to the house in the Avenue d'Eylau.

George let him talk himself out, and then calmly replied, that he preferred to go there alone, so as to prevent a public scandal which might be disagreeable to Mme. de Sartilly. She understood his meaning, and thanked him with a glance.

Then Vacheron began on another subject which it was

equally painful for his daughter to listen to. "You know," said he, "what has happened to-day at the races? This grand gentleman has robbed the men of his own stamp, and those imbeciles he calls his friends, by making his horse lose. Well, there he is over head and ears in the mire at last, and I am glad of it, for Paris will now be freed from his presence. He had given his written promise to do so, and now he will have to keep to it, for he can never come back again. Can he, Valentine?" Then as the Countess bent down her head without making any reply, he continued: "Thou can'st not deny it for thou wert at the race, and I was quite right to send thee there with Trévières. Thou heardest the people shouting: 'Sartilly is a thief, a rogue, a blackleg,' but fortunately thou wilt not for much longer bear the name of a swindler."

"Father, father," pleaded Valentine.

"He is not at his first crime," continued Vacheron, pitilessly, "he forged thy signature, and tried to poison thee before that, and henceforth I hope that thou wilt cease to uphold him."

"It is not forbidden me to pity him," murmured the young woman.

George was at once made acquainted with several matters of which he had been ignorant before, and perceived that bad as Florence might be, she had not deceived him in pointing out the danger that hung over Mme. de Sartilly. He had come expressly to put her on her guard, and yet he hesitated to denounce the dark designs of the villain.

The poor lady was already so much overcome that it was repugnant to George's feelings to wound her yet more deeply in the presence of her father and this young man, and he would have preferred to have spoken to her without witnesses, but he saw no opportunity of obtaining a private interview with her.

At this instant the servant entered with a letter in his hand. "A man with a gold band round his cap has brought this from Saint Germain," said he.

"Give it to me," exclaimed M. Vacheron.

"It is not for you, sir, it is for Madame," said the ill-trained servant, placing it on the table before Valentine, whose colour fled as her eyes fell on the address.

"Why dost thou turn pale?" cried the old man, sharply. "Confess that thou recognise the writing. Confess that this letter is from him."

Valentine raised her head and answered calmly: "Yes, this letter is from my husband. Why should I conceal it from you? I cannot prevent my husband's writing to me any more than I am compelled to reply to him."

"Answer? You can't do so now," broke in the stupid servant who had remained in the room. "The commissionaire who brought it has gone."

"Get out of this," shouted Vacheron, "this isn't the place for you." Then as soon as the foolish fellow had left the room he continued; "I hope that thou art going to leave his letter unread."

"I will burn it when *you* have read it," answered his daughter.

Vacheron did not wait for a second authorisation to open it, and he broke the seal growling out: "From Saint Germain—he is at St. Germain, is he, the scoundrel!—What can he be doing there? Preparing some new roguery, I suppose."

"Read it, father, read it aloud."

"Dost thou really mean it? What, before these gentlemen?"

"These gentlemen are my good friends, and I have nothing to conceal from them, whatever the Count de Sartilly may have thought fit to write."

"Aha!" said Vacheron, "I begin to believe that thou art cured, since thou no longer wishest to have any secrets with this man. He never believed that thou wouldst show me his letter, and so he has not hesitated to write some other nonsense, by which he hoped that thou wouldst be entrapped as thou hast been before. No, no, Count. My own little Valentine knows what your true value is and you won't catch her again; and now let us see what he has dared to write." He then read out the contents of the letter in a loud voice, often stopping to comment on them. "See," cried he, "there is no heading, neither my dear Valentine, nor Madame, nor only Valentine. He doesn't know how to begin after what he has done—that's it, I understand now! 'I saw you yesterday at Longchamps. You were not alone, but I do not reproach you. I have lost the right to do so.' Here is a miracle, he actually does himself justice! But I still have the right to protest against the abominable calumnies with which I have been overwhelmed. I cannot dispense with your respect, nor can I bear to think you believe me guilty of the vile acts which evil tongues have ascribed to me. My horse has been disqualified because his jockey had been bribed by one of my enemies, most likely by Oxwall the bookmaker, who proposed to me to allow Snowflake to be drugged, so that he might be beaten, and I might make money by laying against my horse. I indignantly refused to lend myself to this fraud, and to revenge himself on me for my refusal, he has plotted with Mowbridge, my jockey. These two rogues must have

gained an enormous sum of money, whilst I have lost a great deal, and yet no one will believe me. Ruined financially, and my honour attacked at the same time, it is more than I can bear. The enquiry which the stewards of the race are about to institute, will, I hope, clear up everything, and prove that I have been the victim, and not the accomplice of Oxwall and Mowbridge. But even this will not reinstate me in the opinions of fools, nor will I endeavour to struggle against the decisions of those whom I despise. All I care is that you should learn the truth. Abandoned by you, persecuted by my enemies, and overwhelmed with insults, I am wearied of the life I have led, and am about to leave France for ever.' So he has made up his mind at last? Well, that is lucky for him. 'Tell your father that I shall faithfully carry out the engagement I made with him. The day after to-morrow I shall sail for England, and henceforth I shall reside abroad. I have all ready. After the race I went to stay at St. Germain, and I shall sleep to-night at the Henry IV Pavillon. To-morrow about twelve, I shall return for the last time to our former home, for I have some papers to destroy. This will only take me a few hours and I leave for Calais by the night train.' Good night, my dear Count, and a prosperous voyage to you! 'Amongst these papers, there is one written and signed by you under circumstances which you have certainly not forgotten. If I take it away with me to foreign parts, you may imagine that I have kept it to make use of in some way against you, at a future period. If I told you that I had burnt it, you would not be obliged to believe me. I must therefore give it into your own hands? Have you the courage to come and fetch it to-morrow from the Avenue d'Éylau?' Good, just another dodge to bring about a reconciliation. 'Do not fear, this is no trap. There will be no question of anything between us, save of this restitution. I will not speak to you of the past, nor of the future. After this interview that I have asked for, we shall remain as we now are, strangers to each other. I do not desire, any more than you do, an impossible reconciliation. You may even, if you wish, settle the whole affair by suing for a divorce. I shall not oppose it. Each of us can then obtain freedom, and you can, if you desire it, contract another marriage, in which I earnestly desire that you may find all kinds of happiness.' Yes there is the velvet paw, have a care of the claws. 'I would have spared you this trouble, but as you can imagine, I do not wish to present myself at your father's house; and I think that you will agree with me, that it would be better for him to remain ignorant of the very existence of such a document. He will not understand the feelings that prompted

you to pen those lines, which, in our own hearts, were but the evidence of our mutual confidence and love ; I will therefore wait for you to-morrow all day, and if you desire it our interview can take place in the garden. Until to-morrow then, and whatever may happen, believe in the sincere and unchangeable affection of GONTRAN.' Amen !" cried Vacheron, throwing the letter on to the table. "All's well that ends well, and now thou art freed from this gentleman, at the expense only of paying him his allowance while he remains away from France. We can now proceed with the divorce, and since we need fear no opposition on his part, the trial will be a mere form, and so wilt thou do me the favour of telling me what this paper is, about which Sartilly writes such fine things ?"

George Cézambre could have answered this question, for he had received information regarding it from Florence, and he felt sure that the woman was right in her notion that Gontran would murder his wife at the proposed interview, and endeavour to make it appear that she had committed suicide. However he felt that it was his place not to interfere yet, but to wait for Valentine's reply to her father's question.

Valentine did not hesitate for a moment. "This is what I wrote," answered she coldly. "'Life is a burden to me. I die of my own free will. Let no one be accused of my death. Heaven will judge me,' and then I signed it."

"Unhappy girl," exclaimed Vacheron, "it was thy death warrant that thou didst sign. By this thy husband could murder thee with impunity, and all would believe that thou hadst killed thyself. And has he this paper in his hands ?"

"He has. What does it matter ?"

"What does it matter ? Indeed, it matters so much that he has but to leave it by the side of thy body, after he has made away with thee, to screen himself. He has written this letter to draw thee thither, and if thou dost so, thou wilt never return again alive."

"I am not going," answered the Countess, in a decided tone.

"I hope not, but he will come here ; he will find some pretext to persuade thee to receive him, even if he does not try to assassinate thee when thou goest outside the house. As long as he has this paper, thy life is in jeopardy."

"Do you wish me then to go and reclaim it ?"

"No, no," replied Vacheron, quickly. "I will go."

"He would not give it to you—But why should he wish to kill me ?"

"To inherit from thee, dost thou not understand ? He has thy will, in which thou makest him residuary legatee, though I begg'd thee to make another."

"I have done so, and revoked my former one. I am ready to show it to thee. I have left M. de Sartilly an income during his life of sixty thousand francs, and nothing more. I do not wish him to starve."

"Thou hast been too good to him, he could have lived on much less. But thou hast done right to revoke thy former will. All thou hast to do is to inform thy husband of the existence of this second one, and this I will do for thee. I can kill two birds with one stone. I can tell him of the change in thy testamentary dispositions, and I will demand from him the slip of paper which puts thee in his power."

"I had rather that the demand came from someone else."

"And by whom, pray? By our friend Trévières? Sartilly will look on it as an insult. He knows that if thou couldst obtain a divorce Trévières would marry thee, and he will treat him so that another duel would be the result."

"I will undertake the duty, if you will permit me," cried George Cézambre.

"You, my friend! You certainly could do so, but your intervention would be almost as dangerous as that of Trévières. Sartilly surprised you in his house three months ago. He would certainly try to fix a quarrel on you. And besides, on whose part could you go to him? Not as the representative of my daughter, for that would never do."

"I go on my own behalf. I have a personal matter to settle with him. He has carried away and hidden Mlle. de Ganges."

"That is true. I had forgotten it. Lisa told us that to-night you were going to look for her; but you will not see Sartilly, for he writes from Saint Germain, where he says he is, unless, indeed, he lies."

"Whether he has lied or not, I shall go."

"You are right," said M. Vacheron. "What time have you fixed upon?"

"I am to meet Lisa at two in the morning, in the Rue Villejust."

"But Lisa is here."

"She is going to fetch Domingo."

"Your negro? Ah, he will be useful, for you may have trouble with Sartilly's servants, and two men, in such a case, are better than one."

"Lisa has plenty of time to fetch him from Auteuil."

"There is no use in all that trouble," said Trévières. "I will willingly take his place if you will permit me."

"I thank you kindly, sir," answered George, "but I do not wish to expose you to any risk."

"We will share the danger and the honour, too, for it will be a source of the greatest pleasure to aid you in rescuing Mlle. de Ganges."

"Thou art acting rightly, Henri," said M. Vacheron, "but my dear George, Lisa says she thinks that the poor young woman is injured."

"I shall see her at any rate, and know what has happened to her, and then I shall know what to do."

"You are right, you must certainly question her," murmured the ex-contractor, who could not divest himself of the idea that Diana had followed Gontran of her own free will.

George guessed his thought. "If she declines to follow me I will not force her," said he, "but I will compel M. de Sartilly to give me satisfaction. I shall then have an opportunity to talk with him, and will say to him everything that you yourself could."

"It will be to-morrow, then, for I believe to-night he is really at Saint Germain."

"I believe so too, and it seems to me that it is useless to wait until two o'clock. When the master is away, the servants will not keep a strict watch."

"And besides, Lisa has a key," said Valentine, "the key of the little door leading into the garden. The servants never go out into the grounds, and when they are left to themselves they sit in the servants' hall and gossip."

"I can then make the attempt much earlier, there are not many people in the Avenue d' Eylau."

"No, but there are the neighbours," said Vacheron; "M. and Mme. de Saint Senier."

"Neither of them will interfere with me," returned George. "I have taught them not to interfere with me, and if they do so —"

"You will make them keep their place, I have no doubt; but they have servants."

"And my presence will be useful in preventing them from intervening," said Trévières, "therefore, pray let me come with you."

"I am quite willing," said George, "but I wish to enter Mlle. de Ganges' room alone."

"That is most natural. I will keep guard at the gate—if you are attacked you have only to call out to me."

"Very good," said Vacheron. "My daughter approves of your expedition, and I endorse her opinion; but I am of opinion that you should waste no time in acting. It is near eight o'clock."

"In two hours we can go," said George.

On mature reflection George had decided to say nothing of Florence's revelations. Valentine was now perfectly acquainted with the nature of the danger that menaced her, and appeared to be entirely cured of her foolish passion for her unworthy husband. At last the time for departure arrived,

and Valentine asked George what he had settled to do at the close of the expedition. George replied that he could not tell what the result might be, but that he would certainly send Lisa to the Rue de la Neva in any case to report what had taken place ; he further promised to come over himself in the morning, and begged M. Vacheron not to go out without first seeing him, as it was necessary that he should hear what had taken place before his intended interview with his son-in-law. The worthy man understood this and promised to do as he had been asked. Valentine was visibly affected by the danger that Trévières might possibly encounter, and George could not help thinking how well all would end for her if she married her lover of former days, after obtaining the divorce which it was not likely that the Court would refuse to grant.

CHAPTER XL

THE CHAMBER OF DEATH

TEN o'clock struck from the belfry of the Russian church as Cézambre, Trévières, and Lisa started on their expedition. They walked quickly, and on arriving at the Avenue d'Eylau, they perceived with pleasure that it was entirely deserted. The shops were shut, and a change had taken place in the weather, for a fine rain was falling which drove pedestrians to their homes. As they passed the front of M. de Sartilly's house, Lisa pointed out that the windows were not lighted. It seemed as if everyone was asleep, and if any of the domestics were still up, they were evidently gossiping in the kitchen. There was not even a light in the porter's lodge, who was in the habit of playing cards with his wife after their dinner. As they turned the corner of the Rue Villejust, Lisa pointed out a light on the first floor in the left wing. "That is in Mlle. de Ganges' old room," whispered she, "and not only proves that she is in there, but that she has not yet retired to rest."

A little further on, they came to the small door opposite M. de Saint Senier's house, all the lights of which had been extinguished except the gas in the courtyard. The Viscount had no doubt gone to dine at his club, and his wife was

rambling about somewhere, according to her custom. There was no one to be seen in the garden. Now or never was the moment to act, and Lisa opened the door noiselessly. Then they divided their duties. It was settled that Trévières should take up his position inside, and Lisa outside the door, which was to remain half open until George's return, who was going to venture alone into the dominions of the Count de Sartilly. If he was attacked he could fall back on the rear guard, so that it was impossible for his retreat to be cut off. George Cézambre pressed Trévières' hand, and passing through the door, walked straight across the lawn to the left wing, where he hoped to find Diana safe and sound. He carried his revolver in his hand and advanced with great caution. He knew the grounds well, for had he not been through them on a snowy night, with the shots fired by a servant whistling round him. The snow had gone, and Mme. de Saint Senier's coachman no longer wished to kill him, but for all that he ran great risk, for it was very probable that the Count had ordered his servants to fire on any intruder. There was no one in sight, the grounds were deserted, and the house as silent as if it had not been inhabited. George recognised the place where he had fallen on the grass by the side of one of the walks, and where Diana had come to his aid, and this seemed to him to be a happy omen. The woman who had shown so much love and devotion for him, could never have left him for a degraded man. He had no difficulty in finding the staircase that led up to the apartment that she had formerly occupied, and he hastily ascended it. In the darkness he stumbled and almost fell, making a great deal of noise. He stopped and listened, but the door was not open on the landing. This was the door that led into the little sitting-room behind which Diana's bed-room was situated ; he crept up to it, and placed his ear against it. There was no sound in the room, though he had seen from the outside that there was a light in the windows. Perhaps Diana was sleeping. At last he made up his mind to knock, gently at first, then louder, but there was no reply. He could not understand it. Had Diana been asleep the noise would certainly have aroused her, and if she were injured and unable to answer, surely someone would have been in attendance on her. He could restrain himself no longer but felt for the key : it was in the lock, he turned it, and entered the sitting-room. There was no one there, but the place was all in disorder ; some female attire was flung about, and on a table were medicine bottles and a small copper lamp which burned with a dim light. And still the same alarming silence ; the silence of the tomb. George shuddered. The shadow of death seemed to be hovering over the room in

which his romance of love had first commenced. The door of communication between the two rooms was half open. There was a light in the inner room which must be placed near the bed ; he could not see it, however, for the half open door hid all except an overturned chair, and a wardrobe with glass doors. He had but a step to make to cross the threshold, but he did not dare to do so ; and remained with extended arms and fixed gaze, hardly daring to draw his breath. In the glass door of the wardrobe he could see the reflection of the bed, and on it was the stretched and motionless form of a woman. Then he took the decisive step, but scarcely had he passed through the door, then he stopped short, rooted to the spot with surprise and horror. The pallid countenance on the pillow was that of Diana de Ganges ; her magnificent hair surrounded it like a halo of gold, her eyes were open, but the light of life no longer shone in them. No friendly hand had been found to close them ; and the coverlet hurriedly thrown over the body, covered it to the neck, though one arm hung down from the bed. "Dead," murmured George with a shudder. "Oh, no, not dead ; people do not die like this." He felt her hand, it was icy cold ; he had not even the courage to press a kiss upon it. "The wretch has murdered her." In this he was wrong, but he was right in saying, "And all have deserted her." Everything, indeed, went to show that the attendants on the injured woman had hurried away, as soon as she had expired, and in their eagerness to escape had upset a chair. George might well have forgiven them for this, for he, too, turned and fled, never stopping until he reached the gate where he had left Lisa and Trévières. He found them talking with Francis who had come across them whilst making his rounds, and was just explaining the melancholy event to them. "Ah, sir," said he to George, "it is very sad. Dr. Pontier was here at six o'clock, but Mademoiselle was still in a high fever, but he told me that when that passed off, she would be out of danger. He wrote a prescription and left, saying that he would return to-morrow morning. A quarter of an hour after that the fever ceased, and Mademoiselle began to get drowsy. The woman who had been by her bedside since yesterday must have dropped off to sleep, and when she awoke Mademoiselle was dead. Dead without pain, for she had not uttered a sound. The woman when she touched her and found her cold, lost her head and ran away. She stopped for a minute to ask the porter and his wife to go and stay with the dead woman, but they refused, nor dared I do so. I am nervous, and am afraid of dead people."

"Where is your master ?" interrupted George.

"We none of us know ; he has not yet come in. His

coachman waited for him at Longchamps until seven o'clock, behind the Stand, and at last brought back the carriage without him. It appears that the Count left the course on foot. I have been most uneasy, for it seems there are strange stories going about regarding the race. M. de Saint Senior came here to enquire about him, and when he heard that I had not seen him, he went off muttering, 'It is likely that he may have drowned himself.' Do you think that there is any chance of that, sir?"

George made no reply, but Lisa cried out, "Your master is a villain, for he is the cause of Mademoiselle's death. Dr. Pontier is a fool, and you are all a set of heartless creatures to have left her alone as you have done. I will go and watch over her."

"And I will share your vigil," said George Cézambre. Then drawing Trévières aside for a moment he added, "I beg you to go back and tell M. Vacheron what has taken place. I shall remain here to wait for Mlle. de Ganges' murderer; he belongs to me, and he shall die by no other hand than mine, but I will not prevent M. Vacheron from demanding from him the dangerous document he holds. I will wait until the interview is over. The Count will doubtless arrive early, and when he hears of Diana's death, he will not care to enter the room in which her body is. Let M. Vacheron come to-morrow morning and get what he wants; then it will be my turn, and I swear to you that before nightfall the victims of this villain shall be amply avenged."

"I will do as you wish, sir," replied Trévières, gravely. "I would willingly take your place in the combat, but that is impossible. Your cause is a just one, and you will rid the earth of a scoundrel; but I hope that you will permit me to be your second."

George grasped the hand which Trévières extended to him, then going up to the valet he said, "Now listen to my orders and obey them. Before to-morrow night, your master, if he is still alive, will be in the clutches of the law. He has stolen—do you understand, and I suppose that you do not want to share his fate?"

"Oh, no, sir," cried Francis, eagerly.

"Work with us," broke in Lisa, "It is your only chance of safety, and if, as you have so often said, you have any real affection for me, prove it now."

"I will most willingly do so."

"Where are the other domestics?"

"In the servants' portion of the house; including the porter and his wife, and they would not venture out for a great deal. They believe that a crime has been committed and expect the police every moment."

"The police will be here to-morrow. Now oblige me by locking up the servants in the basement ; I don't want them to pry into our affairs. Then you can go to bed."

"I daren't do so ; I was unable to sleep just now and was smoking my pipe at the window, when I saw some person in the garden, and therefore came down."

"Well, go upstairs now, and do not stir until daybreak ; if you are wanted I will come for you. Now, then, will you come with me ?" added she, turning to George Cézambre.

Trévières sadly returned to the Rue de la Neva. Francis, who had seen that obedience was his best policy, went up to his garret in the roof, and George and Lisa entered the chamber of death. Lisa sank on her knees and murmured a prayer for the soul of the departed, whilst George overcome with emotion, threw himself into an arm-chair.

And whilst all this was taking place, Gontran de Sartilly, with a cigar in his mouth, was walking up and down the terrace at Saint Germain thinking of the morrow. "Valentine will surely come," thought he, "but at what hour ? Probably when Vacheron goes out for his usual walk. I must therefore, catch the first train. The interview will be a decisive one, but I must be prudent. I will do nothing until I am sure that she has not revoked her will ; I hope not, and if not—well, to-morrow I shall be a widower."

CHAPTER XLI

THE FINGER OF FATE

VALENTINE and her father had sat up to wait for Henri Trévières' return, who came back about midnight, and brought them the melancholy news of Diana's death. Valentine, who had loved her fondly, burst into tears, but M. Vacheron, though almost as much affected as his daughter, did not weep, but poured out a string of invectives against Sartilly whom he accused of being Diana's murderer. Everything showed, however, that she had died from the effects of the terrible accident that she had met with in the Bois de Boulogne, and so Trévières told the ex-contractor who was

reluctantly convinced, but maintained that the entire responsibility of the unhappy event rested on the shoulders of his son-in-law. And in this he was not wrong, for the unfortunate Diana had been thrown from her horse entirely owing to Gontran's fault. To the old man's great pleasure Valentine did not seek to defend her husband. She was certainly cured of her unhappy attachment, and he endeavoured to profit by her novel feelings to enter upon a subject which was the dearest wish of his heart. "Listen," said he, "the moment has come to act with decision. Tomorrow I will finish up with the man who bewitched thee. Thou seest him now in his true light."

"Alas, I do."

"And thou wilt acknowledge that he is unworthy of pardon?"

"Of pardon, yes ; of pity, no."

"I grant thee that if thou desirest it ; therefore, I will not deliver him up to justice. I had sooner he disappeared, and I believe that he is making up his mind to do so. In the letter he wrote thee, he confesses that he can no longer remain in Paris ; I shall therefore have no trouble in forcing him to leave at once, and as he well knows that if he attempted to return to France I should cut off his supplies, he will keep away. But when he has left, what will thy position be ? Thou wilt be neither maid nor wife, thou wilt be a deserted woman, and as long as he lives thou canst not marry again. Thou art going to say that thou dost not think of doing so, and I say to thee that thou art wrong, for sometime or other the day will come when thou wilt think differently."

"Father, that day has come."

"Good ; now thou hast become reasonable once more. Well, since thou hast given up the idea of making a useless sacrifice of thyself, thou hast only to divorce him ; and Sartilly must give way, for we hold him tight through his fear of losing the allowance that I have agreed to make him. If I forced him he would apply for a divorce himself, and if we sue for one, he will not dare to oppose it."

"You are right, there, I believe."

"Then thou authorisest me to do it in thy name ? I will see my solicitor to-morrow and talk matters over with him. We have our choice of pleas, but as I go with thee in desiring that he should not have to appear in the Criminal Court, either for the forgery he committed, or the murder he attempted, it will be sufficient to prove that he had carried off thy recent companion, and established her under the conjugal domicile. Yes, it will be the more easy to prove that since she died there."

"Dead, alone, deserted ; without a helping hand."

"That man is a monster, and banishment is too mild a punishment for his crimes. But when thy divorce shall have been granted, what wilt thou do?"

"What you wish, father."

"Then since thou placest thyself in my hands, thou shalt marry Trévières, he is the husband that I had hoped for thee—thou wilt make him the happiest of men, and he will return with interest the love that thou wilt give him. Thou and he will be a model household. Do not blush, my child. Pardon me, Henri, for not having allowed thee the pleasure of making thine own proposal. I know thy wishes, and I have guessed my daughter's feelings. If all are agreed the marriage can take place in twelve months."

Trévières was intoxicated with delight ; he cast a sidelong glance at Valentine, and read in her eyes her determination to be his wife.

"And now," continued Vacheron, "that I am at ease regarding thy future, I have only to take precautions against M. de Sartilly, who holds thy life in his hands ever since thou hadst the imprudence to sign that paper, which I must get from him at any cost ; but, tell me, how did he obtain it from thee?"

In a few words Valentine explained exactly what had passed on the night when Gontran had surprised George Cézambre in her room, whither he had sought refuge from the pistol of Mme. de Saint Senier's coachman.

"It is hardly credible," said Vacheron.

"I have the copy that he wrote for me."

"Hast thou kept it?"

"I have, though I hardly know why."

"It is Heaven who has inspired thee with the idea. Where is it?"

"Here," replied Valentine, drawing a small piece of paper doubly-folded from her bosom. "I had thought that if I wanted mine back, I might offer him the original in exchange."

"I will give it to him," said Vacheron, putting it carefully into his pocket-book.

"You persist then in your design of going to him to-morrow yourself?"

"Of course I do, more than ever. There is no time to be lost. I want him to leave the day after to-morrow, and the chance is a good one for forcing him to do so. Mlle. de Ganges' body is still there, and before the day is out the Commissary of Police will come to inquire into the circumstances of her death. I will venture to affirm that Sartilly will not be there to meet him, and that he will quit Paris at once."

"Yes, I think so, too ; and it is better that I should not see him. But there is nothing to prevent my going and pressing a last kiss on the forehead of my unfortunate friend."

"I will not prevent thee from doing so ; but do not let that man come near thee."

"Do not fear, father, I hold him in utter detestation ; and, besides, I shall not go alone, for I hope that M. Trévières will be good enough to accompany me," said Valentine, extending her hand to the man whose wife she had just promised to be.

It looked like a second betrothal, and Vacheron seemed to think it one ; for he rose up hurriedly, and, placing his daughter's hand in that of the enraptured Henri, he cried out :

"My children ! this is the happiest moment of my life. My boy, kiss thy future wife."

Trévières did not profit by the good old man's authorisation until he had consulted Valentine by a look, and her expressive glance gave him the consent that he was waiting for.

"And now, my dear friend," said Vacheron, "return to your own house, we all have need of rest. At what o'clock will you go to see our poor Diana ?"

"Will ten o'clock suit you ?" asked Vacheron.

"Perfectly," returned Trévières.

"My father will come with us to the doorstep, and then he can leave us, whilst we go together to the room where the body of my poor friend is."

"Very good," replied Vacheron, who had, however, a perfectly different intention. Trévières took his leave, Valentine went to her own room, whilst Vacheron proceeded to his study. Did he exaggerate the risk he might run in discussing so momentous a question with his dangerous son-in-law ? It was a doubtful question ; but one thing is certain, that he passed his night in putting his papers in order, cataloguing his investments, and making his will, exactly as if he had been going to fight a duel the next morning. Then various duties occupied him until dawn ; he then shaved and dressed himself, but did not lie down to take any rest. The worthy man had his reasons for dispensing with sleep. He had made up his mind to go to the house in the Avenue d'Eylau before his daughter, and hoped to have settled matters with Sartilly before she made her appearance there escorted by her betrothed. At seven o'clock he was quite ready, and went downstairs silently. The servants rose late at M. Vacheron's, and none of them were up when he left the house. He had put in his pocket-book the copy of the document in Gontran's hand-writing, but he took no weapon to his meeting with his son-in-law, for he distrusted his own hasty temper. Age had not diminished

his strength ; he had been a worker all his life, and it had hardened every muscle and sinew until they were like iron wires. He was not the man to brook an insult, and had Sartilly ventured to assault him he could have crushed him in a moment, and could have as easily killed him with his fist as he could with a revolver if he had had one in his pocket. But Vacheron, enraged as he was with the man, had no desire to kill him. At this moment it would only cause a useless complication, and his daughter had more need of his support than ever ; he had, besides, no wish to be tried for homicide, and be compelled to prove that he had acted in self-defence ; or to have to remain in prison until he was formally exculpated, for he had no time to waste. Vacheron therefore took neither knife or pistol for fear of yielding to a sudden impulse of passion. He merely carried in his hand his cane, with which he always walked ; a strong heavy stick, armed with which he feared no one. When he arrived he found the gate leading from the Avenue d'Eylau open, and passed through without the porter's coming out to ask his business. The house appeared to be entirely deserted, and he reached the steps without meeting any of the servants. Vacheron knew that George and Lisa were in the room where Mlle. de Ganges' body was, but it was not a part of his plan to see them before he had met his son-in-law. He endeavoured to get into the house, but the front door was closed. He would have rung but there was no bell, it being on the outer gate. The porter was not in the hall, and doubtless the master of the house had not returned, as there were no servants about. He therefore determined to walk round the house until he found someone stirring. It was only just eight, and he was not surprised at not finding anyone up, nor that his son-in-law had not yet made his appearance, for the first train from Saint Germain to Paris does not arrive before half-past six, and the station of Saint Lazare is some way from the Avenue d'Eylau. "He will drive here," thought the old man. "I shall hear the noise of his cab, and can wait for him on the steps, so that he cannot avoid meeting me."

As he walked along one of the paths, he cast his eyes upwards, and saw a window open at which a man appeared in his shirt sleeves with a pipe in his mouth. This was Francis, whom he at first did not recognise, as he had never seen him except in livery. The valet, however, knew him, and raising his arms in amazement at so unexpected a sight as M. de Sartilly's father-in-law walking about the grounds, at once disappeared from the window. In a few minutes he came into the garden with his clothes huddled on anyhow, and approached Vacheron in the most respectful manner. "I am waiting for your master," said Vacheron, plainly.

"Are you aware, sir, if he will be here this morning?"

"Yes, and I must speak to him."

"You are aware, sir, that the Countess's former companion is dead and——"

"I know everything. Where are the other servants?"

"In the basement, sir."

"What do you mean?"

Trévières had omitted to inform M. Vacheron of this detail.

"I shut them up there by Lisa's orders," returned Francis with a faint attempt at a smile.

"By her orders?"

"Yes; it seems she is the person to be obeyed now. I do not know what the Count will say on his return."

"Most likely your master will not live here any longer, but the property belongs to my daughter, and you must obey me as her representative."

"Is it true then that the Count is ruined?"

"Yes, and he is about to leave Paris for ever. I have come to settle accounts with him before he does so."

"Then the Countess will return here to live. I hope that she will retain me in her employment."

"Then you don't want to follow your master, it seems?"

"Oh, no, sir; I have endured too much whilst I served him; and, besides, if he has lost all his money, he will send away his servants."

"My daughter will not want the services of a valet, and besides, she will probably sell the house; but I will do something for you if you will obey me this morning."

"I am at your service, sir, you have only to speak."

"I want to talk to M. de Sartilly, and I do not wish to be disturbed during my conversation with him. If he knew that I was here he might perhaps decline to receive me. I therefore forbid you to warn him that I am here. You will simply tell him that some one is waiting for him in the garden, without mentioning names."

"I understand, sir, you can rely on me."

"You will also see that none of your fellow-servants interrupt our conversation."

"There is no fear of that, for I will not let them out. Besides, they have been drinking all night, and are sprawling about all over the kitchen. But Lisa and M. Cézambre have spent the night by the body. Am I to tell them that you are here?"

"No, it would be useless; I will see them when I have finished with M. de Sartilly. Perhaps my daughter may come; if so, you will take her to the room where the body is, and then return to wait in the hall."

"I will do so, sir ; but if you wish to be alone with the Count, the garden is a bad place, for Lisa may come down without my seeing her——"

"That is true, but where can I go?"

"I can take you to M. de Sartilly's room. He will certainly go up there on his return, and he will find some one there whom he does not expect. He will no doubt discharge me for having shown you up there, sir, but I don't care for that."

"Good," said Vacheron, casting a look of contempt on the servant who was so ready to betray his master, "show me the room, and if you serve me faithfully, I will recompense you largely."

"Oh ! sir, what I do is not from interested motives," returned Francis, with the most sublime audacity. Vacheron shrugged his shoulders, and followed the valet to the first floor, where there was a smoking-room, into which the Count's bedroom opened. The old man established himself in the first of these rooms, while Francis hastened to take up the position that had been assigned to him.

The valet had thoroughly made up his mind to throw over his master, who was, as he believed, utterly ruined, and to cast in his lot with his opponents, and by doing this he hoped to benefit himself and to gain Lisa's good opinion. He had not been on guard in the hall for more than twenty minutes when he saw the Count get out of a cab at the main entrance, and hurriedly walk up to the house.

"He doesn't seem in a particularly good temper," thought Francis, "but presently we shall have a fine laugh at him."

To laugh was indeed the last thing that Gontran thought of. He was going to play his last card, and had determined to finish with his wife, once and for all. He had no doubts about her coming, and he intended that she should never return to her father's house. Coward as he was, he seemed not to have reasoned so acutely as he had formerly done, and he had never thought that the letter he had written to his wife could be read by any one except herself. He made sure that she would bring the compromising letter in his handwriting with her ; he would ask her for it, and when once he had it in his possession, nothing prevented him from disencumbering himself of her for ever without any one being able to accuse him of having hastened her end. With a little care, everyone could be made to believe that she had committed suicide. What was easier than to open one of the windows situated some thirty feet above the granite steps of the house, and fling her out, after having slipped into her pocket the letter which she had come to reclaim. She would be certainly killed on the spot, and all that he would have to

do would be to call in the servants, and tell them that, excited by argument, she had thrown herself out. The world might be surprised at this tragic termination, and he might perhaps be at first accused, but the finding of the few written lines on her would at once acquit him of the crime, whilst he would not proclaim the will until the sad event had been partially forgotten.

The execution of this terrible design depended upon the interview that he would have with his wife. If she permitted herself to be again deluded by his prayers and protestations, if she consented to forget the past, and promised to persuade her father to forgive him, and pay his debts again, he would give up, for a time at least, the thoughts of freeing himself by her murder.

These sinister thoughts had clouded his brow, and his first words to Francis were those of anger. "What are you doing here?" he asked harshly.

"I was waiting for your lordship to announce some sad news to you," answered the valet, without appearing in the least disconcerted.

"What are you interfering about now?"

"Your lordship will pardon me, but I thought it advisable to let you know as soon as possible that *Mlle. de Ganges is dead.*"

"Dead!" repeated Gontran, "that is impossible; why yesterday the doctor had every hope of saving her."

"Unhappily he was wrong, for *Mlle. de Ganges* drew her last breath shortly after the doctor had left, without even regaining consciousness. It was too late to report the death in the proper quarter, so I thought that I had better await your lordship's return to ask what was to be done."

Sartilly did not attempt to counterfeit any sorrow. Instead of being afflicted by Diana's death, it extricated him from a most embarrassing position. After the misfortune of the day before, Diana, had she lived, would have been a great clog upon him, and now nothing prevented his asserting that after the accident, she had managed to speak, and had begged him to take her to his house. He had had nothing further to do with her, and no one could reproach him for what he had done. "It is unfortunate," said he coldly "Has Dr. Pontier been informed of what has taken place?"

"Not yet, but he will be here at twelve o'clock."

"Very well, beg him to fulfil the necessary business formalities, as I have no time to occupy myself with them. Where are the other servants?"

"They got alarmed; some ran away, others went up to their rooms, and have not yet come downstairs. I was the only one who sat up all night. Does your lordship wish me to call them?"

"No, it would be useless. You have my orders to prevent them from entering the room where the body is, and let them go on with their work as if nothing had taken place. As for you, you can remain here, until I give you fresh orders. I am expecting Mme. de Sartilly."

Francis stared at his master, wondering if he was in earnest ; but he did not utter a word.

"You will receive her here," continued M. de Sartilly, "and usher her up to my room ; then come and wait here, and permit no one else to enter the house. Do you understand ?"

"Perfectly, your lordship."

Without adding another word to these brief instructions, Sartilly ascended the staircase leading to his own rooms, whilst his valet muttered to himself, "A nice figure he'll cut, when he finds papa-in-law up there. I don't think that I shall sleep here to-night ; but I don't care : when there is a bull in the field it's best to be on the right side of the hedge. All I am sorry for is that I shan't hear what old Vacheron has to say to master. They will be at it hammer and tongs directly, and if the Countess comes in when the row is at its height, it will be rather funny." Francis should rather have said, "It will be tragic."

When Gontran de Sartilly opened the door of the smoking-room, and saw his father-in-law, his rage blazed out at once. "You, in my house !" exclaimed he. "What are you doing here ?"

"I am not in your house, it belongs to my daughter."

"It is mine, as it is a part of her dowry as long as I am her husband. Leave the house this instant, or I will have you pitched out by my servants."

"I do not advise you to try it. Do you see this little stick ? Try on any game, and I will knock you down with it, and then go and fetch the police." The old man grasped his cane firmly as he spoke, and would have done as he threatened in a moment. Sartilly at once saw that it was necessary to ask him his reasons for coming, and not to push him too far, so he continued, drawing a revolver from his pocket, "You see that I am armed. Do not compel me to act in self-defence. If you venture to raise your stick, I will shoot you without a moment's hesitation. What do you want here ?"

"I am surprised that you have not guessed the reason. You had the audacity to write to my daughter —"

"How do you know that ?"

"She showed me your letter. You ought not therefore to be surprised at her sending me, instead of coming herself."

"Then you represent her ?"

"I do," answered Vacheron.

"What have you come to ask for ?"

"The document that you offered to return her."

"I will give it back to her, but not to you."

"You are wrong. I would have given you in exchange the copy written in your own hand. If you refuse, I will keep it. It will serve as a proof that you intended to murder your wife as soon as you got the opportunity, and I will explain to the Court, when, and under what circumstances, you got a letter which would have enabled you to slaughter her with impunity."

"Suppose I consent to return it to you, then ———"

"We have nothing more to discuss. I hold to the terms of our previous agreement, and I am sure now that you must do so too ; for after what happened yesterday at Longchamps, you can no longer remain in France. Your creditors and your friends at your club will combine to drive you out of it. I may add that you would derive no benefit from this confession of suicide which your wife had the incredible weakness to sign, for even if you murdered her, you would not inherit her fortune. She has revoked the will which you took away, after your attempt to poison her, and that is why I came here to ask you for that and the paper I before alluded to, for they are neither of them of any value."

Sartilly grew visibly paler. He saw that all his dark designs had been exposed to the light of day, and he perceived too late that with all his cunning, he had gone too far in confiding on either the renewal of Valentine's tenderness, or on her silence. She had evidently told all to her father, and the draft of the document, which she had preserved, would be sufficient to convince any judge that he had premeditated making away with her. The wretched man had often wondered what had become of this copy, and after his wife's hurried flight, he had fruitlessly sought for it in all the draws and receptacles in the room, and had at last come to the conclusion that she must have burnt it. And now this piece of damning evidence had turned up in the hands of Vacheron, who was not restrained by the same scruples as his daughter, and would not for a moment hesitate to make use of it against his unworthy son-in-law. Sartilly was vanquished, and nothing remained for him but to submit to the conditions which his conqueror had imposed, unless he could succeed either by force or stratagem, to tear from him the paper which held him at his mercy. "I am awaiting your decision," observed the ex-contractor, coldly. "Will you or will you not restore the document to me?"

"Why are you so anxious to have it, since you have no cause now to think that my wife's life is in danger?" asked Sartilly, audaciously.

"What does that matter to you? I want it, and that is enough."

"Very well, then, let us make an exchange; one document for the other."

"That is exactly what I proposed to you, and I will not go back. And I repeat to you that I will interfere with your future life no more except in paying you your allowance every three months. I shall not think the pleasure of getting rid of you has been purchased at too dear a price."

"You have this paper about you?" asked Sartilly.

"It is in my pocket-book. Where is the other?" responded Vacheron.

"In my pocket-book, too."

"Then we can at once make the exchange; only I must tell you that if I am to carry out the terms of our agreement you must agree to consent to a divorce. My daughter will sue for one. If you defend, I stop your allowance."

"On what will you ground your petition?"

"I might answer that that was no concern of yours, and that at the proper time you would receive a citation in due form. But I have no objection to tell you that nothing will be said about the bill for three hundred and fifty thousand francs, or of the poisoned glass of water. I retain the bill, and I can lay my hand on it at any time, and the witnesses to the poisoning case; and these are arms which I shall keep to defend myself with in case you attempt some fresh act of criminality."

"This is all idle talk. Come to the point; what will be the charges my wife will make to the Court?"

"She has so many to choose from. Serious injuries, constant ill-treatment, squandering of property, notorious bad conduct, without even saying a word about the carrying off of the young woman who has just died in your house."

"What! You know that too?" muttered Sartilly between his teeth.

"I know everything," returned Vacheron; "don't run after will-o'-the-wisps, but give me your paper."

"Give me yours."

The father and the son-in-law were standing up face to face, almost touching each other—Sartilly still holding his revolver in his hand, and Vacheron grasping his stick. A table stood beside them which seemed placed there on purpose to facilitate the exchange, for each man distrusted the other, and feared that he would endeavour to seize the precious document.

Sartilly was the first to see to what use the table might be applied. He stepped back a couple of paces, laid down his revolver which was ready cocked, and took out his

pocket-book, from which he extracted Valentine's declaration which he read aloud and showed to Vacheron from the spot where he stood. During this time Vacheron, in no way intimidated by his threatening demeanour, felt in his pocket and pulled out the copy written by his son-in-law, and held it out to him, still grasping his stick firmly.

This armed negotiation would never have been concluded had not Vacheron, growing impatient, cried out, "Throw down your paper on the table, I will do the same with mine, and let each take up the one that belongs to him."

After a moment's hesitation Sartilly obeyed. The two pieces of paper fell on the table cloth at the same moment. All that was to be done was to pick them up, and Vacheron's hand at once closed on that which bore the signature of the Countess. Sartilly offered no opposition, and allowed his document to lay open on the table. He was in his own house, and had plenty of time to pick up and burn the compromising paper after his father-in-law had left the house. Vacheron had already turned towards the door when with the bound of a tiger Sartilly sprang on him, and seized him by the collar, pressing the barrel of his revolver to his head and exclaiming, "Let go that paper, or I will blow out your brains."

Vacheron let go the paper, but it was to seize with both his hands the revolver which was pointed at his head. Sartilly had his finger on the trigger, the sudden shock made him press it, and the pistol exploded.

Gontran fell like a log: the bullet had entered his right eye and lodged in his brain.

All was over so quickly that Vacheron hardly knew what had occurred. Stunned by the report, he staggered back as Sartilly sank down, and it was some seconds before he could recover himself.

The body of the Count lay motionless at his feet. Hardly any blood flowed from the wound, but the pistol had been fired so closely that the face was blackened with powder. His fingers already stiffened in death grasped the pistol tightly, and everything bore the appearance of a pre-meditated suicide.

Vacheron was much excited, as it was natural that he should be, but he could not feel any grief for what had happened, and he did not lose his head for a moment.

He hastened to pick up his daughter's declaration, and placed it in his portfolio. The copy in Sartilly's handwriting was on the table; he left it there, and hurried from the room. In the hall he found Francis, who had been walking up and down, and had heard nothing. A pistol shot does not make much noise when it is fired in a room with closed doors, and where the hangings deaden the sound.

"Your master is dead," said the old man, quietly; "go and fetch a Commissary of Police." He had no intention to repeat to the valet what had taken place at an interview that had had so tragic a termination, and he reserved his explanation for the police authorities.

"Then he must have killed himself," said the valet.

Vacheron did not contradict him. "I expected it," continued Francis, "and it is the best thing that he could have done. Am I to say, sir, that you were present when the Count killed himself? I suppose he blew out his brains, for he always carried a revolver in his pocket."

"Tell the truth. I shall remain here. Go, and be back as soon as you can."

Francis hurried off, delighted to be freed from a master whom he dreaded as much as he hated. Vacheron took up his position on the steps of the house, to await the arrival of the authorities. He had no wish to conceal anything at his examination, for he had nothing to reproach himself with; but he was not yet quite certain of the turn that matters might take. He was the only one present at the time, and his evidence might be looked on with suspicion. He did not wish either to speak about the matter which had brought him there, or the angry discussion that had terminated in the death of his son-in-law. But nothing in the world would have induced Vacheron to tell a lie. There was however no reason for him to reply in a manner that should at all compromise him; and he was already thinking in what terms he should frame his justification, when he saw Henri Trévières and Valentine coming up the road that led to the house. They had come at the appointed time, and they had no doubt but that the old man was there before them, for on enquiry they learned that he had gone out very early without saying a word to anyone.

CHAPTER XLII

"HOIST WITH HIS OWN PETARD"

VACHERON went forward to meet them, and instead of at once telling his daughter of her happy deliverance, he merely informed her that her former maid was still with George Cézambre watching over the dead body of Diana, and begged her to go and assist them in their sad duties. "Henri will escort you," said he, "and I will soon rejoin you, meanwhile I must stay here."

Valentine imagined that her father was waiting for

Gontran, and did not insist on his accompanying her. She had no wish to meet her husband, and therefore went away at once, for she thought that he might arrive at any moment, and taking Trévières' arm, they directed their steps towards the left wing of the building, so as to reach the rooms where the body of the poor girl was lying.

Vacheron followed them with his eyes, and then once again took up his position at the door of the house. The Commissary of Police soon made his appearance, for his office was not at any great distance, and he happened to be in when Francis arrived. He knew the Count de Sartilly and the ex-contractor by sight and reputation, and treated the latter with the greatest courtesy. He had brought with him his secretary, a medical man, and two inferior agents, an array which would have struck terror into the hearts of the servants had they been present. Francis brought up the rear.

An enquiry was at once instituted, but it did not take very long. The doctor after a short examination declared that M. de Sartilly had shot himself through the eye, holding the barrel of the revolver close to his face.

Vacheron when questioned, deposed that all had occurred so quickly that he could give no account of what had taken place, and that he had perhaps killed himself owing to the enormous losses which he had lately met with, being greatly excited by a violent altercation which he had just had with him; and then as he was going on to express regret for having been the involuntary cause of the death of his son-in-law, the Commissary interrupted him. "You have nothing to reproach yourself with, sir," said he, showing him a paper as he spoke, which he had just picked off the table. "This is M. de Sartilly's writing, is it not?"

"Yes sir," replied Francis, "that is my master's handwriting." Vacheron confirmed this by a nod, and the Commissary then read in a loud voice:

"Life is a burden to me. I die of my own free will. Let no one be blamed for my death."

"Had I had any doubts," continued he, "this declaration would have at once removed them, and if the Count did not sign it, it was evidently because he had no time to do so; doubtless he was writing this when you came in."

Vacheron bowed without making any reply; there was no need for him to attempt to justify himself, since the representative of the law pleaded his cause and acquitted him of all blame.

Sartilly himself had furnished the evidence which proved the innocence of Valentine's father.

The diabolical scheme which he had invented to enable him to assassinate his wife with impunity, had but served to

save the father-in-law whom he detested, from the difficulty of defending himself ; and this new practical exposition of the *lex talionis* was a righteous one, for it had struck down the guilty, and shielded the innocent. Vacheron had nothing more to do save to ask for permission to withdraw, which the Commissary not only granted, but conducted him himself to the landing-place, where he even thought it necessary to condole with the old man who had so wide a reputation for honesty and wealth. "Believe me, sir," said he, "I only questioned you as a mere matter of form. I have for a long time heard many unpleasant reports regarding M. de Sartilly, and I could not help thinking that he would come to a bad end ; and now that he is dead, I may mention, that this very morning I received a report which accused him of a swindling transaction connected with the races at Longchamps, which I should have been compelled to refer to the Criminal Court, so that it is perhaps as well that he is dead."

"You are right," returned Vacheron, "and I do not believe that the news of his suicide will surprise anyone, unless indeed it be my unfortunate daughter, and it would be impossible to hide it from her, even if I wished to do so, for she is here at this moment."

"What!" exclaimed the Commissary ; "why, I heard that she had left this house to escape from her husband's ill-treatment."

"So she had, but she came back to-day, and it would be well for you to know her reason for doing so. She had a companion, whilst she lived here, who was also her very dear friend."

"I know," interrupted the Commissary of Police, who seemed to know everything that had taken place in the neighbourhood. "A very handsome girl. Mlle. de Ganges, who ran away some three months ago with a young man."

"Quite right ; well, the day before yesterday, Saturday, she fell from her horse in the Bois de Boulogne. The Count, it appears, found her, and brought her here in his carriage. She was placed in the room which she had formerly occupied, but she died last night without returning to consciousness."

"Indeed, that is curious. Has the proper information as to the death been sent in yet?"

"I believe not."

"Then there is a fresh enquiry to be made, and I will go——"

"You can easily satisfy yourself that this death was the result of an accident. The doctor who has been attending her can vouch for it, as well as the servants."

"I will examine them—and the licence for burial shall not be delivered until a *post-mortem* has taken place."

"Yes, I know that this is the official way of doing things ;

all that I ask, sir, is to permit me to go and fetch my daughter who is with her dead friend. She was very fond of Mlle. de Ganges ; she had forgiven her for what she had done and wished to see her for the last time before the earth was heaped over her.

"Yes, yes, that is natural ; but ——"

"You must hold an inquest, I am aware ; but before proceeding to do so, give me the time to fetch away my daughter, and I entreat you, do not summon her as a witness. She has yet to learn the death of her husband, and the shock of both events will be very terrible for her."

"It is not necessary that Mme. de Sartilly should be present. It will be sufficient, sir, if you will hold yourself in readiness to attend if required."

"With the greatest pleasure, sir ; permit me to add that I intend to pay my son-in-law's debts of all kinds. Now that he is dead, the complaint addressed to the police would, of course, fall to the ground, but my daughter has borne his name, and I do not wish that it should be linked with the word insolvency. This is all that I can do. I cannot restore to him the honour that he has lost—but, after all, death wipes out everything."

The Commissary was not a man subject to emotion. The exercise of his official duties had hardened his heart to family troubles, but even he felt moved by this simple yet noble language, coming from the lips of a man who had risen from the working classes, and who added one more sacrifice to the many he had already made by endeavouring to preserve from blemish the name of a gentleman who had shown that he was possessed of neither heart nor gratitude.

"Enough, sir," said he, grasping M. Vacheron's hand, "and rely upon me to do all that I can to spare you, and Mme. de Sartilly from vexatious annoyances. I will send for you when I require you."

The old man thanked him heartily, and hastened away to rejoin Valentine. He could no longer defer letting her know the tragic fate of her unworthy husband, but he could not bring himself to allude to the melancholy event in the room where the corpse of poor Diana was lying. This last grief, however, was spared him. Valentine had not been able to endure for any length of time the melancholy sight, and her father meet her in the garden bathed in tears, and supported by Trévières and Lisa.

George Cézambre was behind them with frowning brow, and eyes in which there were no traces of tears. To the heartrending despair of that long night passed by the side of the body of the woman he adored, had arisen a burning desire for revenge.

He left the group of weepers, and came straight to Vacheron, and in a voice stifled with rage, said, "Has he come? Have you seen him?"

"I have seen him," replied the old man, gravely.

"Where is he? Take me to him, I want to kill him."

"You cannot kill him. Justice has been done."

"What do you say? Has he been arrested? Why did you give him up to the police? The wretch belonged to me, and I had sworn that he should only die by my hand."

"He died by mine; his victims are avenged, and Valentine is a widow!"

* * * * *

Diana de Ganges had a magnificent funeral. She, who during her life had been known as Fickle Heart, sleeps her last sleep in the Cemetery of Auteuil, beneath the shade of a weeping-willow, which Valentine had caused to be placed over her grave, and under heaps of flowers, which are daily renewed.

All those who had loved her followed her coffin, and George Cézambre acted as chief mourner.

On the same day Gontran de Sartilly was interred at Père Lachaise. Four magnificent horses, with floating plumes, dragged his funeral car to the splendid family vault, where repose two generations of the Counts de Sartilly, whose haughty bones must have quivered with shame as they came in contact with the body of the forger and the villain. His carriages, draped in black, with the footmen in deep mourning, followed the hearse, but not a friend, for he never had any, followed; not even one of the companions of his pleasures condescended to attend.

Peter Vacheron, who had been a humble mason, paid with money honestly acquired, for all the funereal pomp of this titled scoundrel. He would not allow his daughter's husband to be borne to the grave except in a manner befitting his position; and besides all this, he paid all Sartilly's debts, even to his turf ones, and for a long time afterwards the bookmakers spoke with delight of this unexpected windfall.

No one suspected Vacheron for a moment of having killed his son-in-law, but he often asked himself if he had not contributed to it by suddenly altering the direction of the weapon with which the villain was menacing his life. But after many a hard bout between himself and his conscience he ended by acquitting himself, and even the most severe or partial judge must have done the same.

It was Sartilly's finger that had pressed the trigger, but the hand of God that had directed the bullet.

Valentine shed many tears for the man who had caused her so much suffering; but reason at last came to her aid, and she

consoled herself for the death of her persecutor. An affectionate father still remains to her, and a true friend who will certainly later on be a loving husband, for Vacheron is looking forward to her marriage with Henri Trévières next year.

But for George Cézambre there was no consolation. He returned to Mauritius, and it is not likely that he will run the risk of again breaking his heart in Paris.

Saint Senier has met with a good deal of trouble of late. He dropped a large sum of money over Snowflake ; and the other horses in his stable, the expense of which remained on his shoulders, were beaten whenever they ran ; and as if to add to his vein of ill-luck, his wife suddenly took it into her head to sue for a separation, and to claim certain sums abstracted from the settlement, which she contends that he had no right to touch. If she gains her suit, and is left to her own devices, she will soon drop out of her sphere, and there may be fine times in store for footmen and lackeys, though she has not yet got rid of her coachman.

One personage in these pages who had not great reason to be delighted over the discomfiture of the Count de Sartilly, was William Oxwall. He certainly doubled his capital over the Produce Stakes, but Mowbridge, who had somehow or other ferretted out some portion of the truth, has followed him from racecourse to racecourse with such a series of insults and accusations of having promised him money to lose the race, and then refused to pay him, that the astute bookmaker has found it advisable to transfer his operations once more to the other side of the Channel.

Malvina, in spite of her natural antipathy to England, has followed him there ; but Paris will soon see her again, for a feeling of home-sickness, and a longing for balls at the barriers and open-air concerts, is beginning to creep over her.

Mowbridge cannot get a mount anywhere, and is going fast to the bad.

Francis, dismissed by M. Vacheron, and rejected by Lisa, who is again Mme. de Sartilly's maid, is very discontented. He made an effort to enter the service of Mme. de Saint Senier, but she changed her mind at the last moment on the grounds that he was not young enough.

Domingo left France with his master.

The Villa de Primevères is to let, and the house in the Avenue d'Eylau is for sale.

Florence, the depraved Florence, who went back to her former vicious life, has just been sent to the prison of Saint Lazare for six months.

THE END.

The Parisian Library of highly-readable Translations of the foremost
Foreign Fiction.

Price 1s. each vol., Richly Coloured Paper Covers; 1s. 6d. Cloth (post. 2d.).

COMPRI NG THE SOLE AUTHORIZED TRANSLATIONS OF

FORTUNÉ DU BOISGOBEY'S ENTHRALLING NOVELS.

"M. du Boisgobey gives us no tiresome description or laboured analysis of character; under his facile pen plots full of incident are quickly opened and unwound. He does not stop to moralize; all his art consists in creating intricacies which may keep the reader's curiosity on the stretch, and offer a full scope to his really wonderful ingenuity for unravelling."—*The Times*, Oct. 9th, 1884.

"The Blue Veil; or, The Angel of the Belfry."

"M. du Boisgobey's romances are better than the thrilling tales which are so passionately admired at present. . . . Sensation novels are the mania of the moment, and especially French sensation novels, and, among French novels, especially those of Fortuné du Boisgobey. . . . The readers of Du Boisgobey's novels are, at least, as numerous in London as in Paris. . . . Those whose passion for sensation is gratified by an accumulation of horrors will find their literary taste gratified by 'The Blue Veil.'"—*The Whitehall Review*.

One Volume Complete of the PARISIAN LIBRARY. Autograph and Portrait.

"The Cry of Blood."

Given a murder enveloped in almost inscrutable obscurity, which would task a whole Scotland Yard of detectives, Du Boisgobey alone among French romancists can conduct the reader to the ultimate catastrophe with a fluent and entertaining style. Not a moment is lost in dissertation: the characters are painted at full length and in their complexion and habits as they lived, but yet they are not unduly dwelt upon. Hence there is not a line to fatigue, and the reader gratefully lays down the book through which "the cry of blood" rings, and would fain repeat such a literary treat. But only in another Boisgobey novel is its like to be found.

Two Volumes of the PARISIAN LIBRARY, 1s. each.

Also bound in One Vol., picture cover, 2s.

"The Condemned Door."

Marvellous even among this author's best works for the witching way in which he keeps the tantalizing mystery perfectly masked, and for a fascination surrounding even the evil characters which loses neither in power nor brilliancy to the very end—so dramatic—of the story. Commencing and ending with violent tragedy, the interval is filled up with ardent interest.

*** This is an authorized, protected work, and *cannot be read in any other version.*

Two Volumes of the PARISIAN LIBRARY, 1s. each.

Also bound in One Vol., picture cover, 2s.

"Death or Dishonour."

[In the Press.]

As the groundwork for this masterly novel, we have one of the most puzzling crimes laid bare which distressed and perplexed all Paris. The revelation is admirably presented, and the clearly-drawn characters act out an ingenious drama which sustains M. du Boisgobey's fame as chief of the modern French romancists.

*** This is an authorized, protected work, and *cannot be read in any other version.*

Two Volumes of the PARISIAN LIBRARY, 1s. each.

Also bound in One Vol., picture cover, 2s.

COMPLETE, 1s.; UNIFORM WITH THE ABOVE, IN THE PARISIAN LIBRARY.

"The Wife's Sacrifice." Translated by H.

SUTHERLAND EDWARDS from the French of ADOLPHE DENNERY.

Author of the world-famous "Two Orphans."

LONDON: J. & B. MAXWELL, 22, BRIDE STREET, E.C.

